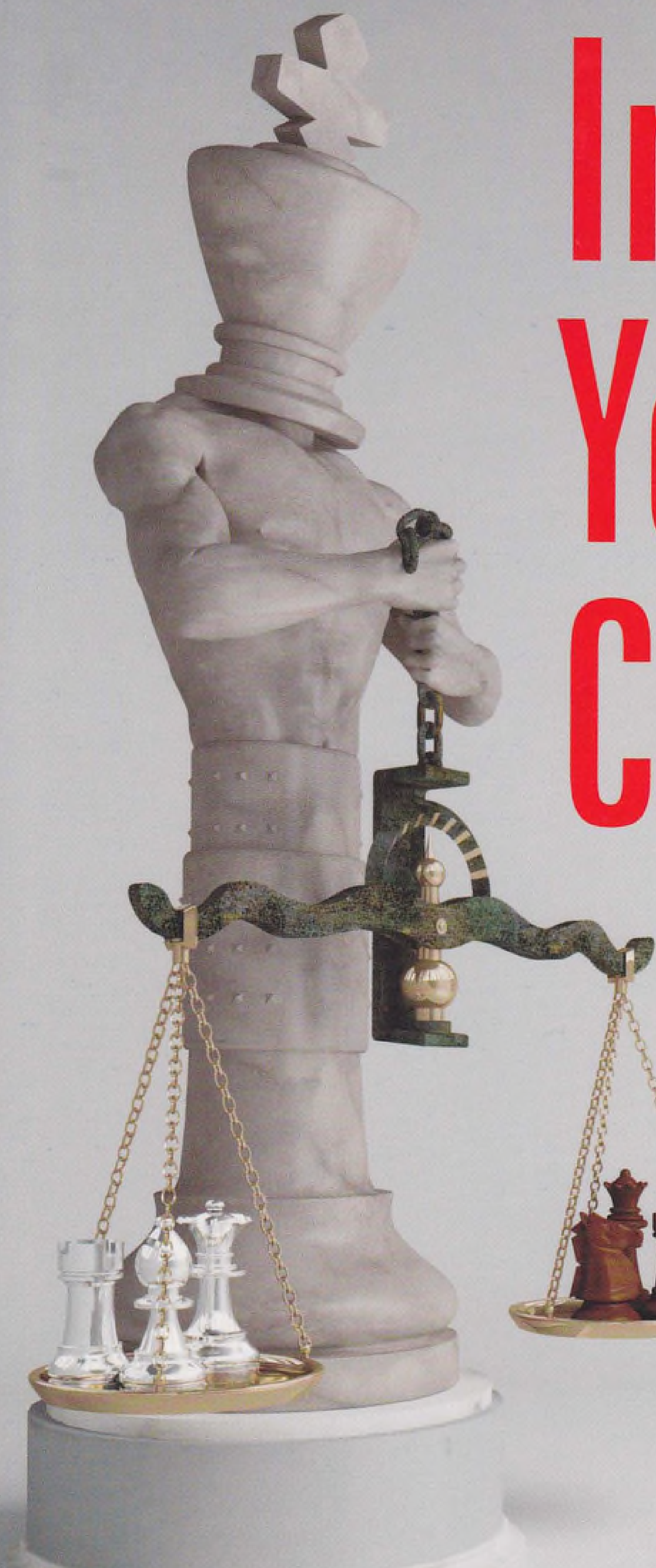
GAMBIT

Improve Your Chess

by learning from the champions



Lars Bo Hansen

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Contents

Symbols

x	capture
+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
Ch	championship
(D)	see next diagram

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Introduction: Why Study Chess History?

If you want to reach the heights, you should study the entire history of chess. I can't give any clear logical explanation for it, but I think it is absolutely essential to soak up the whole of chess history.
VLADIMIR KRAMNIK

This book derives out of my previous Gambit book, *How Chess Games are Won and Lost*. During the course of working on that book, it became clear to me how important a grasp of chess history is for the aspiring chess-player. Not for the historical details as such – that is an added bonus – but because studying the masters of the past can significantly improve your game. The central idea of this book is to show how the way chess has evolved through history impacts the way the game is played today.

Some experts claim that nowadays the rules and principles formulated by former giants like Steinitz, Nimzowitsch or Capablanca are no longer useful – chess has evolved into a concrete, contextual game where each position must be evaluated in its own right. Even the best player of all time, Garry Kasparov, has hinted in this direction. In *How Life Imitates Chess*, he writes "the stringent ideological dogmas are behind us and so are many of the antiquated doctrines of the chessboard. Trends still come and go, but now the only real rule is the absence of rules."

However, I don't believe this is true. I agree that the old rules and principles are hidden and difficult to dissect when looking at the complex grandmaster games coming out of the super-tournaments in Linares, Wijk aan Zee or Sofia. However, 'hidden' is not the same as 'absent'. The old rules and principles are still present, but under the radar – they are implicit. Rather than being the lever that distinguishes strong players from less strong ones, they are now everyone's property. Tarrasch, Alekhine and Capablanca could win games – even against strong opposition – mainly through a better grasp of the emerging strategic principles. That is rarely possible today, as all strong players (must) know and understand the principles. That's why chess has become so concrete and complex – it is the only way to play for a win at grandmaster level. It does not mean that the rules and principles have decreased in importance – on the contrary.

As we shall see, in most contemporary grandmaster games, the old rules and principles still form the basis from which the concrete action flows. Few top games are completely 'random'. Knowing these principles may not lead to a 'competitive advantage' over the opponent, but it is necessary to maintain 'competitive parity'. And you cannot hope to learn how to break the rules if you don't know them. I like to say that *you cannot win games only by following Steinitz's or Nimzowitsch's principles, but you will certainly lose games if you don't know these principles!*

This book is written in response to this need. Studying the great masters of the past is perhaps especially beneficial when it comes to the middlegame. Regarding the opening, there may be little to be gained from chess history as opening theory has leapt significantly ahead since Alekhine and Capablanca's times, but there is certainly much to learn in relation to the middlegame and the transitions from opening to middlegame and middlegame to endgame. Over the past 150 years, chess has evolved rapidly, especially when it comes to understanding the positional aspects of the game. For that we thank the great masters of the past who developed the insights that modern players now take for granted. Studying how the understanding of positional chess evolved from Steinitz over Nimzowitsch and to the present day gives us valuable input into the choice of strategy when entering, playing and leaving the middlegame.

In this book I shall show how chess understanding has evolved, and how a study of the great masters of the past may significantly improve your game. At least, it did for me when early in my career I made a systematic study of the great forefathers of modern chess. In my view, the best way to learn strategic skills in chess is to study well-annotated grandmaster games where an expert goes beyond the cold variations and explains what goes on behind the scenes. If you have read any of my previous books, you will probably have noticed that my annotations of games are mainly verbal, with relatively few variations. This derives from my conviction that this is the best pedagogic approach, and I annotate games in order to help readers improve their game (my background as a business school lecturer probably makes itself felt here!). In this respect I am what Kasparov calls a 'teacher annotator' rather than a 'truth-seeking annotator'.

Therefore I recommend all aspiring chess-players to follow the advice by Kramnik quoted at the top of this introduction – to soak up the entire history of chess. The reason why studying chess history is so important is straightforward: *pattern recognition.* The essence of making strategic decisions in a chess game is to be able to recognize patterns, distinguish patterns from each other, decide which are the crucial ones in the present situation, and finally come to a decision. Nobel laureate Herbert Simon conducted research about experts' decision-making and used chess-players as an example. Simon concluded: "Recognition of familiar patterns is a major component of expert skill, and experts can consequently replace a great deal of heuristic search with solutions, or partial solutions, that they discover by recognition ... The experimental data show that masters and grandmasters search very selectively, using their recognition of cues to guide the selectivity. They search the right part of the space of possible move sequences, achieving great computational efficiency." Expert chess-players know many more positions and patterns than novices, and an important feature of becoming an expert in chess, according to Simon, is to "fill up the reservoir" of positions, patterns and combinations that you know. Studying games from chess history fulfils this purpose. Once you know these patterns, you are in a position to draw upon them in specific contexts and to combine them in new ways.

The legendary military strategist Carl von Clausewitz talked of strategy as a *coup d'oeil* – a 'flash of insight' or 'power of the glance'. A coup d'oeil consists of four components:

- Examples from history
- Presence of mind
- The flash of insight itself
- Resolution

Put differently and adapted to chess: strategic *flashes of insight* come from a vast knowledge of previous games (hence the importance of studying chess history!), an open and alert mind for when particular patterns and principles are applicable (a well-known adage states that "amateurs know how to develop and stick to a plan; professionals know when to change the plan as the circumstances change!"), the strategic plan itself (a combination of patterns and principles), and the skill to put the plan into effect (often referred to in chess as 'technique').

Strategy in chess consists of a number of positional elements, patterns and principles, as taught by Steinitz, Tarrasch, Nimzowitsch and other outstanding chess teachers. To be able to decide the strategic direction of a game, the player must first recognize the elements of the strategic decision. And since the elements have been developed and refined at different points in time in chess history, I shall begin with a small review of the history of chess strategy. I divide chess history into seven distinct phases, each of which will subsequently be dealt with in detail in individual chapters. Consider the following a small appetizer as well as an introduction to the structure of the book.

The Seven Phases of Chess History

Chess as we know it dates back to the second half of the 15th century. By that time consensus had been reached on the rules and, aided by Gutenberg's invention of the printing press around the same

time, in the following centuries chess was brought to a wider audience. The rules of the game have not changed much over the past 500 years, but on the board chess has gone through dramatic changes. In no way is the play of modern masters remotely similar to the play of masters from the early centuries of the game's history. And yet plenty is to be learned from studying the history of chess. That is because chess is a knowledge game in which knowledge is accumulated over time and passed on from one generation to the next. Subsequent generations then draw on the knowledge created by previous generations, as outlined by Simon. To my mind there is no doubt that the present generation of world-class players is stronger than, e.g., the Fischer-Spassky generation, which in turn was better than the Alekhine-Capablanca generation. That flows naturally from the nature of the game. Generations learn from former generations, and in a learning respect chess has a distinct advantage over other sports: all moves are recorded and can easily be made subject to subsequent analysis, thus generating new knowledge. Players with insufficient knowledge of the developments of earlier times will inevitably be at a disadvantage, as they will be forced to figure everything out for themselves, whereas a better-educated opponent can draw on the vast experience of the game's past giants.

But where to start? With more than 500 years of chess history, the task may seem daunting. Some kind of categorization is needed to guide the work process. In my view, chess history can be categorized into seven distinct phases. The first four of these were delineated by the American IM Anthony Saidy in his book *The Battle of Chess Ideas* from the early 1970s, while the last three (including my attempt in the last chapter to predict the future) constitute my attempt to capture how chess has evolved over the past three or four decades. The seven phases – or maybe they can more appropriately be called eras, schools or paradigms – are:

- The Romantic Era (1450-1870)
- The Scientific Era (1870-1920)
- The Hypermodern Era (1920-1945)
- New Dynamism (1945-1965)
- The Age of Universality (1965-1985)
- Creative Concreteness (1985-present)
- The Era of Transformation (future)

The time-periods depicted should not be taken too literally – you can find players with elements of a certain style both before and after the period during which it was predominant. The time-periods given merely illustrate the approximate turning-points in chess history when it comes to strategic thinking in chess, and in any event the periods build on each other and are interwoven. That is one of the key points to be stressed. It is not that a new paradigm outcompetes the previous one; rather it evolves out of the previous one as the boundaries of that paradigm are found. For example, Capablanca and others from the Scientific Era spoke with concern of the risk of chess approaching its 'draw death', as all top players had assimilated and perfected Steinitz's teachings of positional chess. However, this gloomy prediction was premature. The response of chess was – as Saidy puts it, almost as a process of natural selection – the rise of Alekhine, who after absorbing all there was to know from the Scientific School to defeat Capablanca for the World Championship in 1927 showed his willingness to experiment in the spirit of the Hypermodern School (e.g., with his invention of the Alekhine Defence, 1 e4 ♘f6), and with his dynamic style can be said to embody the link from the Scientific Era over the Hypermodern Era and to New Dynamism. However, let us not get ahead of ourselves here. Let us delve into each of the seven phases in turn. We begin in chronological order with the Romantic Era.

You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can't possibly live long enough to make all of them yourself.
SAM LEVENSON

1 The Romantic Era

Chess, like art, like music, has the ability to make men happy.
SIEGBERT TARRASCH

In his fascinating book *The Immortal Game*, David Shenk traces chess 1500 years back in time and vividly describes the place chess has held in society up through the centuries. Remarkably, as Shenk shows, chess occupied a prominent place in ancient societies. Throughout history, chess has been a vital metaphor used in war, art, science and business.

For our purposes, chess dates about 500 years back, to the end of the 15th century. By that time the rules had aligned to the ones we know now, and the first chess books saw the light of day. The *Romantic Era* of chess had begun. The Romantic Era earned its name through its affection for the artistic potential of chess, as evident through the many beautiful combinations and sacrifices from that time. However, it should be noted straight away that from a modern standpoint, the chess played in the Romantic Era has some obvious weaknesses: defensive skills were much below modern standards, and attacks, although in many cases strategically unfounded, still often broke through due to the lack of attention to defensive resources. This point makes the Romantic Era double-edged from a learning point of view: on the one hand any serious chess-player should known the beautiful games of Anderssen, Morphy and others from the Romantic Era. It is not for nothing that two of Adolf Anderssen's games are known as the Immortal Game and the Evergreen Game – they are part of the legacy of our game. On the other hand it is dangerous to try to emulate the reckless attacking approaches in modern practice. I shall therefore focus less on the beauty of the Romantic Era (there are several great books that deal with that elsewhere in chess literature) and more on which learning points in my opinion can be extracted from this era.

The Romantic Era was thus all about *attack*. Especially as White, there was only one way: forward. Material – especially pawns – did not matter much; initiative did. This was especially so because defensive skills, as noted above, were lacking.

Philidor – The Misunderstood Genius

The Romantic Era started with three centuries that are often called *The Italian Age*, since Italy was the dominant chess region at the time – Gioacchino Greco being the best-known name from this period. However, it was only in the middle of the 18th century that chess took a giant leap forward, when the Frenchman François-André Danican *Philidor* in 1749 published his famous book *L'Analyze du Jeu des Échecs*.

L'Analyze is the first chess book that deals with *positional* aspects of the game – notably the important role of the pawns. Until that point – and also a century after since Philidor's thoughts were not understood and adopted by his contemporaries – pawns were considered of minor importance; they could easily be sacrificed even for negligible compensation. This was the general perception until the last part of the 19th century, when Steinitz founded the Scientific School. Even giants such as Anderssen and Morphy had pawn-sacrificing openings such as the Evans Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 b4) or the King's Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 f4) as a firm part of their opening repertoires.

Philidor elevated the pawn to a higher status – "pawns are the soul of chess", he claimed. "On their correct or bad arrangements depend the success of attack or defence; the art of playing with them decides the fate of the game." This statement remains valid to this day.

Why is it that the pawns are of such vital importance? There are several reasons for it. First,

pawns move rarely – at most five or six times during a game and normally fewer – and when they do it is *irreversible*. A pawn move cannot be taken back as in the case of a misplaced piece. This fact alone should caution chess-players to think twice before moving pawns. Second, pawn moves often change the *strategic nature* of the game. They form the strategic basis of the position by determining the evaluation of a long list of positional factors – elements such as piece mobility, king safety, weak/strong squares and open files all derive from the arrangement of the pawns. Philidor was the first to understand this point. And third, today it is recognized that even the win of a 'small and insignificant' pawn is often enough to win a game. Games don't need to be won through a direct attack on the king!

Based on these insights, Philidor formulated a number of positional rules that were later further developed by other masters:

- "An attack should never be begun before the pawns leading it are thoroughly supported. Without this precaution the attack will be quite useless" (this was adopted and refined by Steinitz, who taught us that you should only attack when you hold an advantage, but then you also *have to* attack so as not to lose the advantage)
- "Genuine attacks are carried out by the united efforts of many pieces" (Morphy inherited this concept from Philidor and perfected it)
- "Pawns, especially central ones, that have advanced to the fifth rank, lose part of their strength, since then they can easily be attacked by the enemy pawns from their third rank" (this formed an important part of the Hypermodern School)
- "It is always advantageous to exchange your f-pawn for the e-pawn, since this leads to the seizure of the centre and in addition, to the opening of a file for the rook" (the foundation of the King's Gambit and later the Vienna Game, both popular in the 19th century)

As can be seen from the remarks to Philidor's rules, his ideas were only understood and adopted by later generations, and we shall meet them again in later chapters. In fact, Philidor is probably the player in chess history that was the longest ahead of his time. When Bent Larsen was asked in an interview who he considered the greatest of all time, he replied Philidor. His argument? Exactly the fact that Philidor was further ahead of his time than any other chess thinker has or had ever been. Larsen felt that this was the best way of comparing players from different ages, as comparing their games directly is rather pointless. Given that knowledge accumulates, newer generations will always surpass older ones. However, for Philidor himself it was frustrating that his contemporaries did not understand his teachings. While they did acknowledge him as the best player of the time, he would have liked them to acknowledge his teachings as well. Philidor visited London frequently, and he spent his last years there. He had played numerous games against aristocratic opponents, and when the French Revolution occurred in 1789, it was not safe for him to remain in France. Let us see two games from his London years, which illustrate Philidor's concepts in practice. Notice how Philidor's play includes concepts that were not widely adopted until a century and a half later in the Scientific and Hypermodern eras.

von Bruehl – Philidor
London 1783

1 e4 e5 2 ♗c4 c6

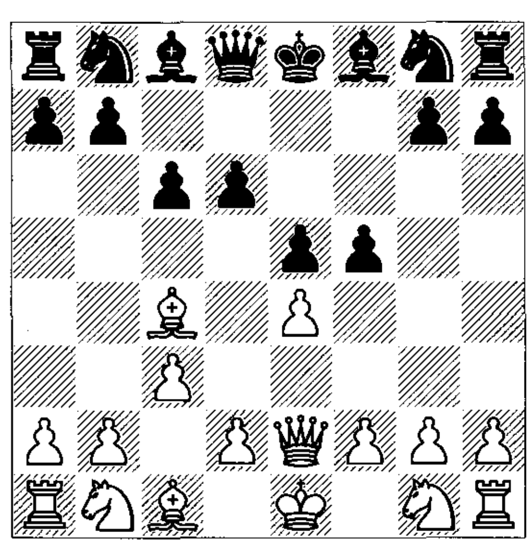
Typical of Philidor – Black wants to conquer the centre by ...d5.

3 ♕e2

Preventing ...d5 but exposing the queen.

3...d6 4 c3 f5!? *(D)*

W



Consistent with Philidor's desire to exchange his f-pawn for the enemy e-pawn.

5 d3

White could try 5 ♗xg8, but after 5...♖xg8 6 ♕h5+ g6 7 ♕xh7 ♖g7 8 ♕h8 fxe4 it is a mess. Philidor was undoubtedly confident that his central pawns would allow him to be safe even with an exposed king.

5...♘f6 6 exf5

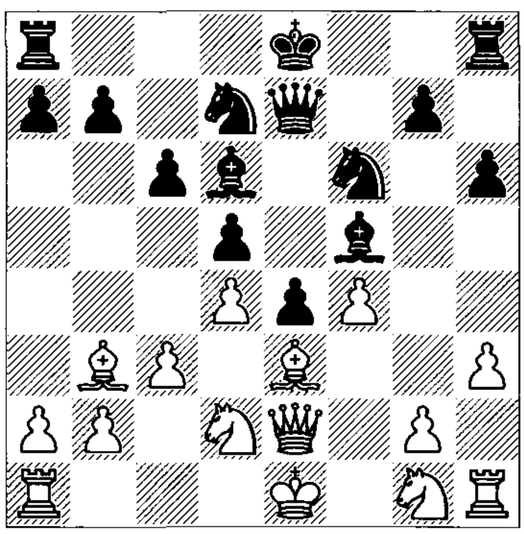
This allows Black easy development. Neishtadt suggests 6 f4 instead.

6...♗xf5 7 d4 e4! 8 ♗g5 d5

Philidor has obtained his beloved pawn-chain – a key part of his theory of play with the pawns.

9 ♗b3 ♗d6 10 ♘d2 ♘bd7 11 h3 h6 12 ♗e3 ♕e7 13 f4? *(D)*

B



13...h5?!

A move in the spirit of Nimzowitsch and *blockade*: Black prevents g4. We shall discuss this concept in much more detail in Chapter 3. The only reason to criticize this otherwise excellent move is that in this particular position 13...exf3! 14 ♕xf3 0-0!, opening the game, is even better, and immediately presents White with serious problems. Philidor liked his pawn phalanxes, sometimes perhaps even too much!

14 c4 a6 15 cxd5 cxd5 16 ♕f2 0-0 17 ♘e2 b5 18 0-0 ♘b6 19 ♘g3 g6! 20 ♖ac1 ♘c4

One more element of positional chess that was later to be adopted by Nimzowitsch: the *outpost*.

21 ♘xf5 gxf5 22 ♕g3+ ♕g7

This is not bad, but keeping the queens on with 22...♔h7 looks even better – Black has good play on the open g-file.

23 ♕xg7+ ♔xg7 24 ♗xc4 bxc4?!

Philidor remains true to his central pawns, but a modern master would probably take with the d-pawn here, obtaining a queenside *pawn-majority* (a Steinitz tool) and a dominant *blockading knight* on d5 (as described by Nimzowitsch).

25 g3 ♖ab8 26 b3 ♗a3 27 ♖c2 cxb3 28 axb3

Perhaps 28 ♘xb3 was better, in order to block the c-file with 29 ♘c5, as suggested by Neishtadt.

28...♖bc8 29 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 30 ♖a1 ♗b4?!

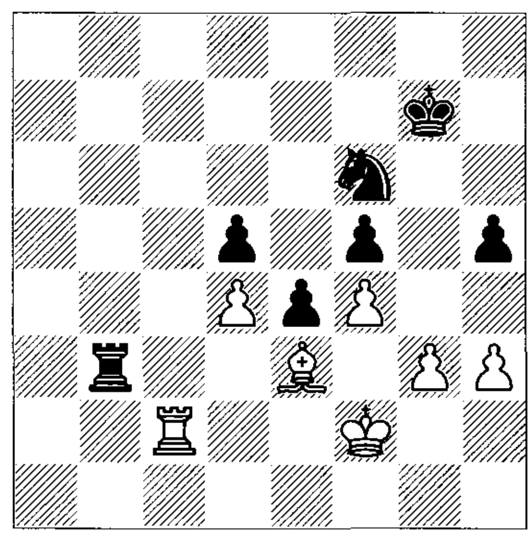
This move appears logical, but the endgame that Black is steering the game towards turns out not to be so advantageous as one might expect. Therefore it seems more accurate to seek a minor-piece ending by 30...♖c1+.

31 ♖xa6 ♖c3! 32 ♔f2 ♖d3!

"A restricted advance on one file with the idea of giving up that file for another one" (Nimzowitsch).

33 ♖a2 ♗xd2 34 ♖xd2 ♖xb3 35 ♖c2 *(D)*

B



35...h4! 36 ♖c7+ ♔g6 37 gxh4 ♘h5! 38 ♖d7

After 38 ♖c6+ ♔f7 the king simply approaches the rook while after 38 ♔e2 Black has the clever 38...♘g3+ 39 ♔f2 ♘f1!, when White has nothing better than entering a similar rook endgame as in the game with 40 ♔xf1 ♖xe3.

38...♘xf4! 39 ♗xf4 ♖f3+ 40 ♔g2 ♖xf4 41 ♖xd5 ♖f3!

Much better than 41...♖xh4. The rook belongs behind the enemy passed pawn.

42 ♖d8 ♖d3 43 d5 f4 44 d6 ♖d2+ 45 ♔f1 ♔f7!

Black must prevent the white rook from attacking the passed pawns from the rear.

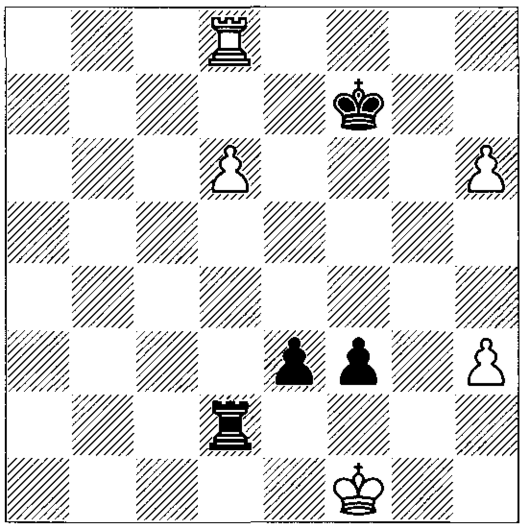
46 h5 e3 47 h6?

This loses without a fight. With 47 ♖d7+ ♔f6 48 ♖d8!, White could not only have put up serious resistance, but even secured a draw!

Black cannot avoid either a repetition or a simplification into a technically drawn position.

47...f3 *(D)*

W



0-1

A picturesque final position that I am sure will have pleased Philidor. The pawn phalanx on e3 and f3 carries the day.

Smith – Philidor
London (blindfold) 1790

1 e4 e5 2 ♗c4 ♘f6 3 d3 c6

Again this move, which is also today considered safe for Black.

4 ♗g5

The modern move is 4 ♘f3.

4...h6 5 ♗xf6?!

Unnecessarily handing over the two bishops to Black. 5 ♗h4 was possible.

5...♕xf6 6 ♘c3 b5!

Gaining space on the queenside.

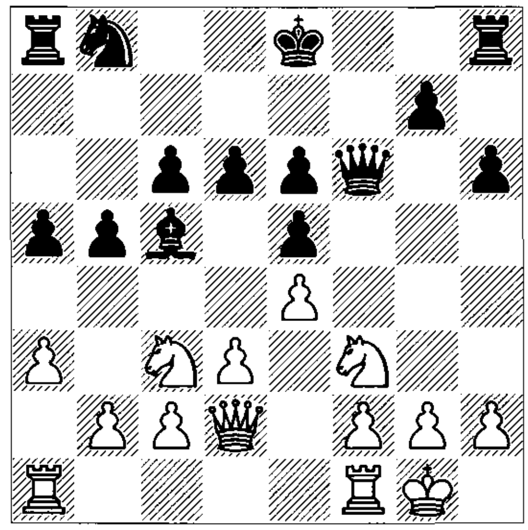
7 ♗b3 a5 8 a3 ♗c5 9 ♘f3 d6 10 ♕d2 ♗e6 11 ♗xe6 fxe6!

Philidor wants his open f-file! This pawn-structure is often seen in modern games arising out of the Ruy Lopez. An interesting recent example is Carlsen-Aronian, Wijk aan Zee 2008: 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 d3 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 a4 b4 9 ♘bd2 ♘a5 10 ♗a2 0-0 11 c3 c5 12 cxb4 cxb4 13 ♘c4 ♖b8 14 ♖e1 ♘c6 15 ♘e3 ♗e6 16 ♗xe6 fxe6 17 ♘c4 ♘d7 18 ♘cd2 ♘c5 19 ♘b3 ♘xb3 20 ♕xb3 ♖xf3!? (Black takes advantage of the open f-file!) 21 gxf3 ♘d4 22 ♕d1 ♕f8 23 ♔g2 ♕f6, and Black had sufficient compensation to draw.

12 0-0 *(D)*

12...g5!

B



An old rule has it that one should only initiate a flank attack if the centre is secure. Here Black's compact centre – fortified by the 11th move – justifies this advance.

13 h3 ♘d7 14 ♘h2?!

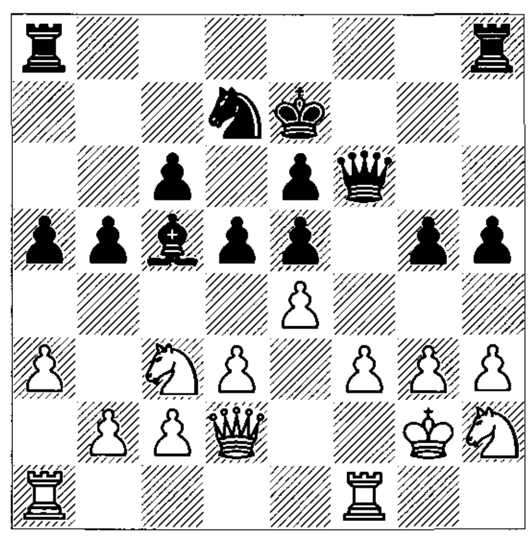
This is too passive. After the more combative 14 ♘e2 or even 14 b4!?, White is much more in the game.

14...h5 15 g3 ♔e7 16 ♔g2 d5!

Black increases his dominance of the centre.

17 f3 *(D)*

B



17...♘f8!

Black transfers the knight to g6, intending to poke a hole in White's fortress by ...h4, gaining the f4-square for the knight.

18 ♘e2 ♘g6 19 c3! ♖ag8 20 d4!

Good defence – White fights back in the centre.

20...♗b6 21 dxe5?

But this is just bad. White hands Black free access to the h2-b8 diagonal.

21...♕xe5 22 ♘d4 ♔d7 23 ♖ae1?!

White should try 23 exd5, seeking counterplay against Black's king.

23...h4!

Breaking down White's defences.

24 ♕f2?

24 f4! is essential.

24...♗c7?

24...hxg3! is winning for Black; the text-move allows White to limp on by 25 ♘g4.

25 ♘e2? hxg3 26 ♕xg3 ♕xg3+ 27 ♘xg3 ♘f4+

Black is winning.

28 ♔h1 ♖xh3 29 ♖g1 ♖xh2+! 30 ♔xh2 ♖h8+ 31 ♘h5 ♖xh5+ 32 ♔g3 ♘h3+ 33 ♔g4

This allows mate but 33 ♔g2 ♘xg1 just leaves White a piece down.

33...♖h4# (0-1)

The Truly Romantic Age

Philidor never managed to educate his contemporaries in the art of positional play, and thus the Romantic Era remained focused on *attack*, as in the Italian Age, and one of its main heroes was Adolf Anderssen. He has entered the historical annals as one of the most enterprising attacking players of all time. Anderssen won the *Immortal Game* (vs Kieseritzky in London 1851) and the *Evergreen Game* (vs Dufresne in Berlin 1852) – beautiful games that can be found in many historical accounts of chess, so I shall not repeat them here. Anderssen's main openings as White were the Evans Gambit and the King's Gambit, with which he won many beautiful games. It was always all about grabbing the initiative, no matter the cost!

Anderssen – Mayet

Match (game 2), Berlin 1851

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 b4!?

The Evans Gambit, invented by Captain W.D. Evans in 1824. In return for the pawn, White achieves rapid development and central dominance – just in the spirit of the Romantic Era!

4...♗xb4 5 c3 ♗a5 6 0-0 ♘f6

The most employed move in this position at the time was 6...d6, leading to the 'Normal Position' of the Evans Gambit after 7 d4 exd4 8 cxd4 ♗b6. Anderssen reached this position in a number of games (see below).

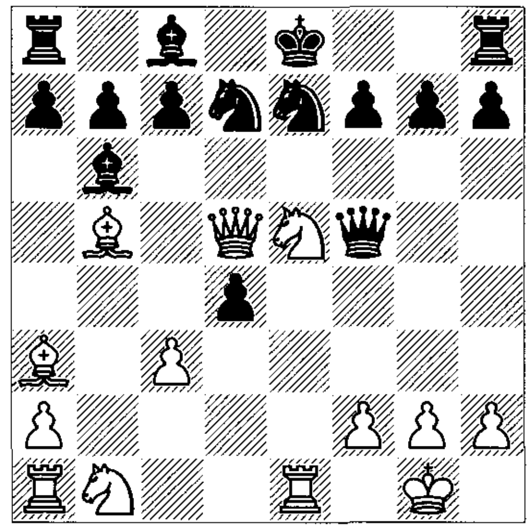
7 d4 exd4?!

This is now considered dubious; 7...♘xe4 and 7...0-0 are safer.

8 e5?!

And here 8 ♗a3! is best, cutting off the black king from escaping from the centre; e.g., 8...d6 9 e5! dxe5 10 ♕b3 ♕d7 11 ♖e1 ♕f5 12 ♗b5! ♘d7 13 ♕d5! ♗b6 14 ♘xe5 ♘e7 *(D)*.

W



15 ♘xd7! ♕xd5 16 ♘f6++ ♔d8 17 ♗xe7# (1-0) Steinitz-Pilhal, Vienna 1862. The future World Champion was not only a positional player!

8...d5 9 ♗b5 ♘e4 10 ♗a3

Remarkably, Anderssen himself used to play this variation as Black. In the first match game against Morphy, Paris 1858, he won after 10 cxd4 0-0 11 ♗xc6 bxc6 12 ♕a4 ♗b6 13 ♕xc6 ♗g4 14 ♗b2?! (Unzicker suggested 14 ♗e3) 14...♗xf3 15 gxf3 ♘g5 with a clear advantage for Black. However, that the German schoolteacher was a better attacker than defender was borne out by another of his games as Black in this line, against Lange in Breslau 1859. In that game Anderssen lost horribly after 10 ♘xd4 ♘xc3? (10...♗d7 is safer, as in another game Lange-Anderssen) 11 ♘xc3? (11 ♗xc6+! bxc6 12 ♕d3 wins) 11...♗xc3 12 ♘xc6 ♕d7 13 e6! fxe6 14 ♘e5 ♕xb5 15 ♕h5+ g6 16 ♘xg6! hxg6 17 ♕xg6+ ♔d7 18 ♗f4! ♔c6?? (after 18...♕b4, it is not clear how White can justify his sacrifices) 19 ♖ac1 d4 20 ♕g7 b6 21 ♖xc3+ dxc3 22 ♕xc7+ ♔d5 23 ♖d1+ ♔e4 24 f3+ ♔f5 25 ♕f7# (1-0).

10...♗xc3?!

Very risky. In a game Dufresne-Anderssen, Berlin 1851, Black was fine after 10...♗d7 11 ♗xc6 bxc6 12 cxd4 c5!.

11 ♘xd4 ♗xa1?

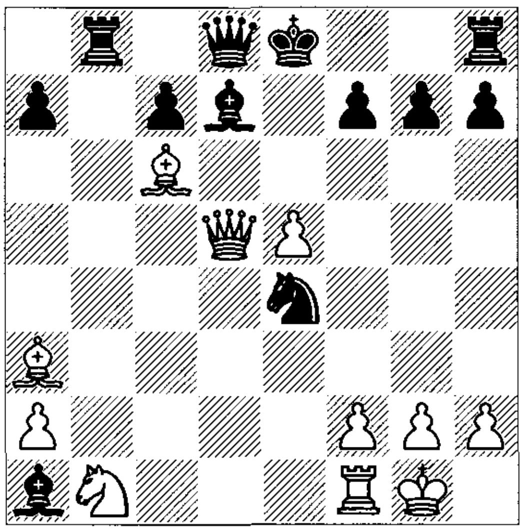
Much too greedy. This was the last chance for 11...♗d7. Now White crashes through.

12 ♘xc6 bxc6

12...♕d7 is refuted by a spectacular and beautiful line, in the spirit of the Romantic Era: 13 ♕c2! a6 (13...♗xe5 14 ♘xa7) 14 ♘b8!! ♕xb5 15 ♕xc7 ♗d7 16 ♖c1, threatening ♕c8+.

13 ♗xc6+ ♗d7 14 ♕xd5 ♖b8 *(D)*

W



15 e6!

The cruncher.

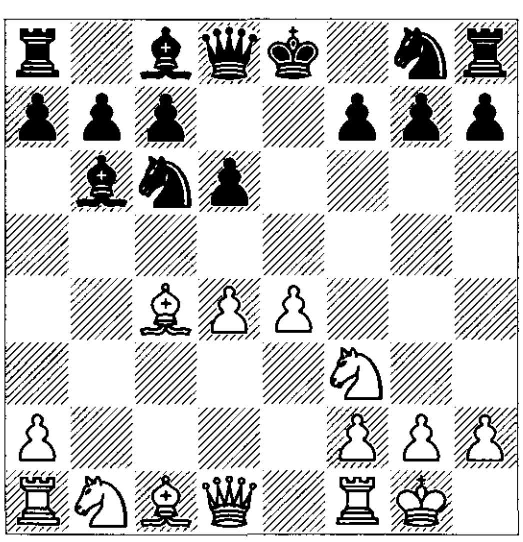
15...♘d6 16 ♗xd7+ ♔f8 17 ♗xd6+ cxd6 18 ♕xd6+ ♔g8 19 e7! ♕b6 20 ♕xb8+ ♕xb8 21 e8♕+ ♕xe8 22 ♗xe8 g6 23 ♘a3 ♗f6 24 ♘b5 ♔g7 25 ♖e1 1-0

Anderssen was not a theoretician; he was mainly a practical player. He kept playing the same openings repeatedly, even if they were well below modern standards. However, who cares when they lead to great and memorable games?!

Anderssen – Zukertort
Barmen 1869

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 b4 ♗xb4 5 c3 ♗a5 6 d4 exd4 7 0-0 ♗b6 8 cxd4 d6 *(D)*

W



As mentioned in the previous game, this is called the 'Normal Position' of the Evans Gambit, and occurred frequently in Anderssen's practice.

9 d5?!

Anderssen's fondness for this move is rather surprising, as it closes the position somewhat and takes momentum out of White's play. He seeks long-term attacking chances based on pressure on the a1-h8 diagonal in combination with an advance of the g-pawn, but according to contemporary theory it should not be too dangerous for Black. Therefore the normal developing move 9 ♘c3 is today the recommended move in this position. This was the favourite choice of Morphy and later Chigorin as well.

9...♘a5 10 ♗b2! ♘e7 11 ♗d3 0-0 12 ♘c3 ♘g6 13 ♘e2 c5! 14 ♕d2 f6 15 ♔h1!

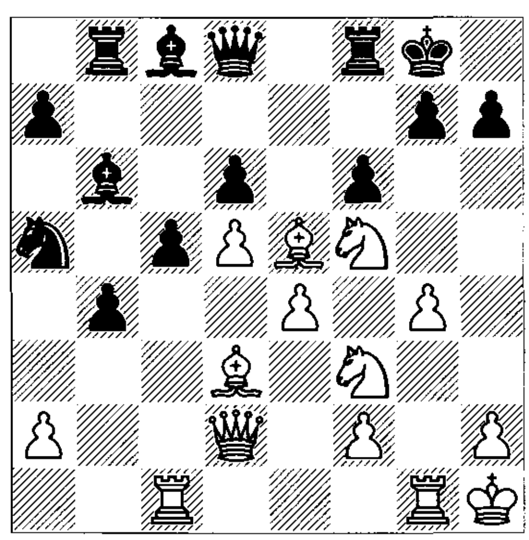
Anderssen's idea. Having more or less forced Black to play ...f6, he now targets this pawn by preparing ♖g1 and g4-g5.

15...♗c7 16 ♖ac1 ♖b8 17 ♘g3 b5 18 ♘f5 b4?!

A conceptual inaccuracy, although perhaps not objectively a serious mistake. Pawns should maintain dynamism when advancing, and after the text-move Black's queenside pawns are blocked, leaving White with a free hand on the kingside. According to Sokolsky in *ECO*, Black is better after 18...c4! 19 ♗e2 (19 ♗b1 b4!) 19...♖e8! 20 ♕c2 ♘f4.

19 ♖g1! ♗b6 20 g4! ♘e5! 21 ♗xe5 *(D)*

B



21...dxe5?

Horrible. Any modern player would not take many seconds to recapture with the f-pawn, taking the sting out of White's kingside advance. Defence was really not a core competence of the Romantic Era. Remember that we are not talking about any player with Black here, but the man who fought Steinitz in the

first official World Championship match in 1886.

22 ♖g3 ♖f7 23 g5!

Anderssen strikes!

23...♗xf5 24 exf5 ♕xd5?

24...c4 is a better defensive try, although White's attack is at least worth the material; e.g. 25 g6 ♖c7 26 gxh7+ ♔xh7 27 ♗e4 c3 28 ♕e2 ♘c4 29 ♖h3+ ♔g8 30 ♘h4 ♔f7 31 ♘g6 ♕d6 32 ♕h5 ♖g8 33 ♗g2.

25 gxf6 ♖d8

25...♖xf6 loses the queen after 26 ♗c4!.

26 ♖cg1!

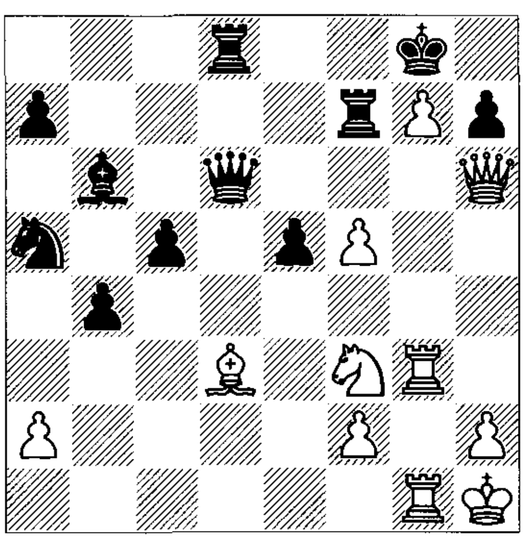
White brings one more piece into the attack. If now 26...♕xd3, then 27 ♖xg7+ ♖xg7 28 ♖xg7+ ♔f8 29 ♕xd3 ♖xd3 30 ♘g5! wins.

26...♔h8!?

Not a bad idea. Black prevents 27 ♖xg7 (no longer check!) because of 27...♕xf3+ and invites White to block the g-file for himself, after which the black king can hide behind the enemy pawn. However, there is a tactical finesse, which Anderssen of course spots!

27 fxg7+ ♔g8 28 ♕h6! ♕d6 *(D)*

W



29 ♕xh7+! 1-0

Anderssen announced mate in five – a well-established practice at the time. After 29...♔xh7 30 f6+! ♔g8 (30...♕xd3 31 ♖h3+) 31 ♗h7+! ♔xh7 32 ♖h3+ ♔g8 33 ♖h8# we have a picturesque end to this game.

Morphy – Master of the Open Position

In the late 1850s a new master came along who took over the status of the best player in the world – at least for a brief period of time. The young American genius Paul Morphy entered the scene, conquered everybody and then left again – all in a time span of very few years. However, Morphy's legacy goes far beyond these few years.

Without in any way detracting from the greatness of players like Labourdonnais, Staunton or Anderssen – they were undoubtedly the strongest players of their time and earned a well-deserved place in the legacy of our game – I feel that the Romantic Era produced only two players that profoundly changed the nature of chess and pointed the way for future generations of chess-players – Philidor and Morphy. We have already discussed Philidor and his profound understanding of the pawns. Morphy revolutionized chess in another way: how to play open positions based on a sound strategic foundation. In *My Great Predecessors, Volume 1*, Kasparov quotes Botvinnik, who said a century after Morphy retired: "To this day Morphy is an unsurpassed master of the open games. Just how great was his significance is evident from the fact that after Morphy nothing substantially new has been created in this field. Every player – from beginner to master – should in his praxis return again and again to the games of the American genius." It is not a coincidence that in the introduction to this quote I used the phrase "a century after". Morphy reigned in the period 1857-8, and a century added to that places us in the era of New Dynamism. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the main founders of New Dynamism – players like Bronstein, Geller and Tal – infused dynamism into chess, and in my opinion this era built on Morphy's influence on the game.

As Kasparov points out, Morphy based his play on three main principles for playing the opening – principles that have remained valid to the present day and which are now almost considered self-evident. The three principles are:

- The rapid development of the pieces
- The seizure of the centre
- The opening of lines

One of Morphy's well-known games against numerous consulting opponents can illustrate these principles in practice.

Morphy – Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard
Paris 1858

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 d6

Philidor's Defence!

3 d4 ♗g4?

This is known to be bad. Today Black either takes on d4 or seeks to enter the Hanham Defence via 3...♘d7 or 3...♘f6 4 ♘c3 ♘bd7, an old favourite of Nimzowitsch's. However, both these move-orders have their problems (3...♘f6 can be met by 4 dxe5, while after 3...♘d7, White places annoying pressure on f7 by 4 ♗c4).

4 dxe5 ♗xf3

Otherwise Black loses a pawn. However, this move hands White the two bishops and fluid piece-play – just what Morphy wants!

5 ♕xf3 dxe5 6 ♗c4 ♘f6?

After this, Black is clearly losing. Kasparov suggests 6...♕f6 or 6...♕d7 and Euwe 6...♕e7 as alternatives, although Black is already in trouble.

7 ♕b3!

A simple double attack on b7 and f7. Remarkably, Harrwitz, one of the strongest players of the time, fell into the same position against Morphy in their match a month later.

7...♕e7

Harrwitz gave up the f7-pawn by 7...♗d6 and survived until move 59.

8 ♘c3!?

A natural developing move and typical of Morphy's style – rapid development had the highest priority! Yet it may only be the third-best move in this position. White could safely take a pawn by 8 ♕xb7 ♕b4+ 9 ♕xb4 ♗xb4+ 10 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 11 ♘xd2, but best was 8 ♗xf7+! ♔d8 (after 8...♕xf7 9 ♕xb7 Black lacks the check on b4) 9 ♕xb7 ♕b4+ 10 ♕xb4 ♗xb4+ 11 c3, and "Black can resign" (Kasparov).

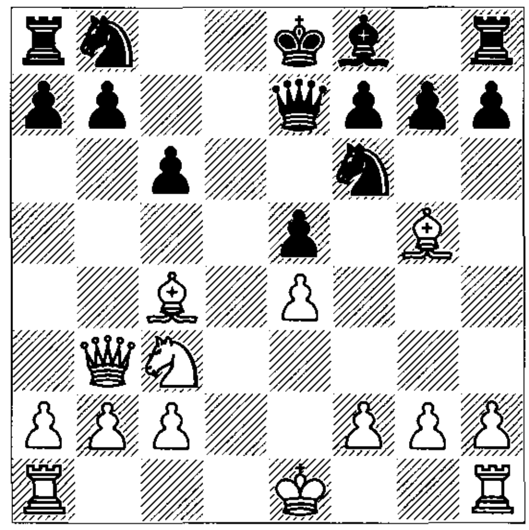
8...c6 9 ♗g5 *(D)*

9...b5?!

This loses, but Black had a hard time finding a good move. The natural 9...♕c7 loses to 10 0-0-0 ♗c5 11 ♗xf7+! ♕xf7 12 ♖d8+! (Neishtadt), while 9...♘a6 10 ♗xf6 gxf6 11 ♗xa6 bxa6 12 ♕a4 is untenable but still Black's relatively best according to Euwe.

10 ♘xb5! cxb5 11 ♗xb5+ ♘bd7 12 0-0-0

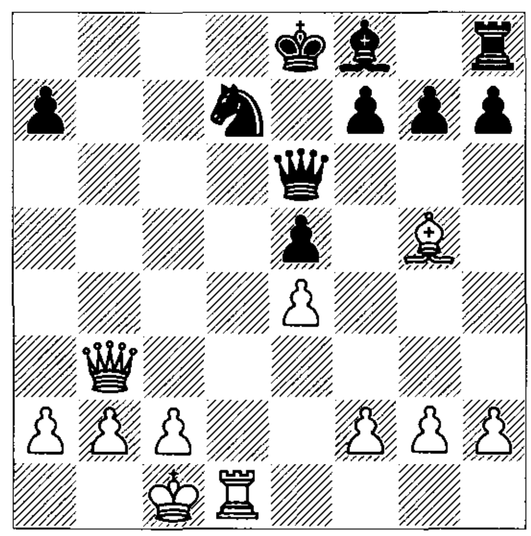
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A brief look at the position is enough to see that Black is utterly lost. White has all his pieces included in the attack – a typical trait in Morphy's games and a century later in those of Tal as well.

12...♖d8 13 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 14 ♖d1 ♕e6 15 ♗xd7+ ♘xd7 *(D)*

W



16 ♕b8+!

A nice *diversion.*

16...♘xb8 17 ♖d8# (1-0)

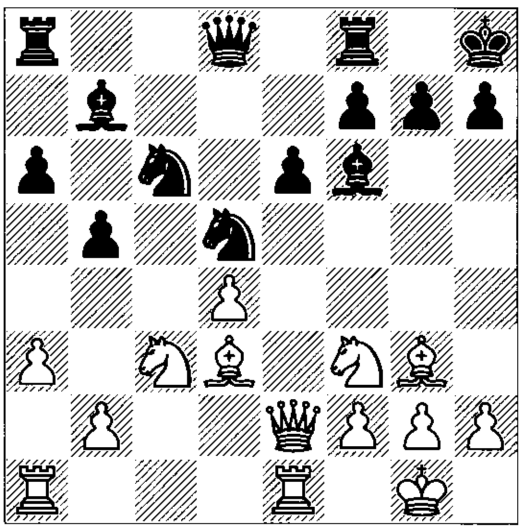
Such games thrilled the chess public and have given Morphy his place in history.

After convincingly beating Anderssen (seven games to two plus two draws) in a match in Paris 1858, Morphy was heralded as the best in the world. This match is Morphy's most famous one, the battle against the best player in the world before him and, as it happened, also after him. Shortly after the match, Morphy returned to the US and never played competitive chess again – a huge loss for the chess world.

However, when studying Morphy's games – in his career he only played 376 of them – I liked another match better than that against Anderssen: the one against Daniel Harrwitz,

also played in Paris 1858. In my opinion, the first few games of this match were played on a higher level than the subsequent one against Anderssen. Eventually Morphy won the match convincingly, five wins to two and one draw. However, the way it happened was interesting: Morphy lost the two first games! Especially in the first he was positionally outplayed by Harrwitz and looked utterly helpless.

W



Harrwitz – Morphy
Match (game 1), Paris 1858

16 ♕e4! g6 17 ♘xd5 ♕xd5

This leads to an inferior endgame, which Harrwitz converts flawlessly. 17...exd5 may have been better – and perhaps more in line with Morphy's active style – although White maintains a solid plus after 18 ♕f4. Especially the bishop on b7 is not well placed.

18 ♕xd5 exd5 19 ♘e5! ♖ad8

19...♘xd4 loses to 20 ♘d7.

20 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 21 ♖ac1 ♖c8 22 ♗d6! ♖g8 23 ♗e5

Forcing a favourable exchange of the dark-squared bishops.

23...♔g7 24 f4! ♗d7 25 ♔f2 h6 26 ♔e3 ♖xc1 27 ♖xc1 ♖c8 *(D)*

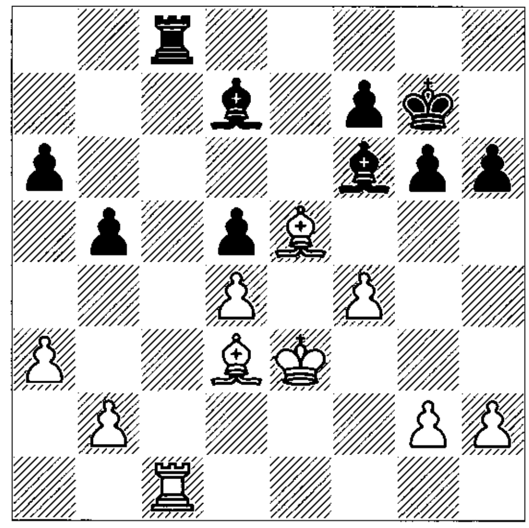
28 ♖c5! ♗xe5 29 fxe5 ♗e6 30 a4! bxa4 31 ♗xa6 ♖b8 32 ♖b5 ♖d8 33 ♖b6 ♖a8 34 ♔d2! ♗c8

The rook endgame is very difficult but otherwise White just picks up the a4-pawn by 35 ♔c3 and 36 ♔b4.

35 ♗xc8 ♖xc8 36 ♖b5 ♖a8

After the passive 36...♖d8 White can slowly improve his position – a good starting move is probably 37 h4 – and at a convenient moment he goes after the a4-pawn with either king or

W



rook. Black has no activity, and that is often fatal in a rook ending.

37 ♖xd5 a3 38 bxa3 ♖xa3 39 ♖c5! ♔f8

39...♖a2+ 40 ♖c2.

40 ♔e2 ♔e7 41 d5 ♔d7 42 ♖c6 h5 43 ♖f6 ♔e7 44 d6+ ♔e8 45 e6! fxe6 46 ♖xe6+ ♔f7 47 d7 ♖a8 48 ♖d6 ♔e7

Or 48...♖d8 49 ♔f3 g5 50 ♔e4 ♔e7 51 ♔d5 and White wins. The pawn ending is hopeless and otherwise White goes ♔c6-c7.

49 ♖xg6 ♔xd7 50 ♖g5 ♖h8 51 ♔f3 ♔e6 52 ♔g3 h4+ 53 ♔g4 h3 54 g3! ♔f6 55 ♖h5 1-0

A good positional game by Harrwitz, reminiscent of the play of later generations. He won the next game too. However, then something happened. In the next four games Morphy went from 0-2 to 4-2. What happened? Morphy showed his ability to *learn and adapt!* He didn't win those four games in his well-known attacking style – these were *positional* victories. Morphy learned from Harrwitz, adapted his game and won convincingly, having raised his game to yet another level. Often people discuss whether old masters would have any chance against modern masters. In general I am doubtful about this – it is part of the evolution of a knowledge game like chess that new generations stand on the shoulders of former generations and surpass them in strength by learning from their predecessors' successes and failures (which by the way is also the basic rationale behind this book). However, if an old master were to hold *any* chances against modern top players, he would have to be able to *learn and adapt* – just like Morphy showed that he was capable of in the match against Harrwitz.

A similar modern case comes to mind: the epic encounters in the 1980s between Karpov

and Kasparov. In the first match in 1984/5 – the one that was never finished – it seems fair to say that Kasparov was not yet entirely at Karpov's level in certain key areas. However, during the 48 games of that match Kasparov learned many lessons and by the second match he had already surpassed Karpov – albeit only by an inch.

Let us see Morphy's first two wins from the match.

Harrwitz – Morphy
Match (game 3), Paris 1858

There is a small anecdote concerning this game. When the Danish IM Jens Enevoldsen – Denmark's best player in the 1930s and 1940s; abroad perhaps mainly famous for a brilliant win against Nimzowitsch in Copenhagen 1933 – was writing his wonderful books *Verdens Bedste Skak* ('The World's Best Chess' – unfortunately only available in Danish), he called Bent Larsen, his successor as Denmark's number 1: "Hey Larsen-man [Enevoldsen's nickname for his young compatriot], this very famous Morphy, did he ever play a really good game by modern standards?" Larsen, a great connoisseur of chess history, immediately replied: "Oh yes, the 3rd game against Harrwitz!" Indeed it is a very good game but not in the style that people normally think of when hearing the name Morphy!

1 d4 f5!?

The Dutch Defence.

2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3

Today 3 g3 is the most common here, to discourage Black's queen's bishop from taking up a post on the long diagonal.

3...♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗b4 5 ♕b3 c5 6 d5 e5 7 e3 0-0 8 ♗d3 d6 9 ♘ge2 h6 10 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 11 a3 ♗xc3+ 12 ♕xc3 ♘d7 13 0-0 ♕g6 14 b4 b6 15 f3 h5 16 ♗c2! ♗b7 17 ♗a4 ♕f7 *(D)*

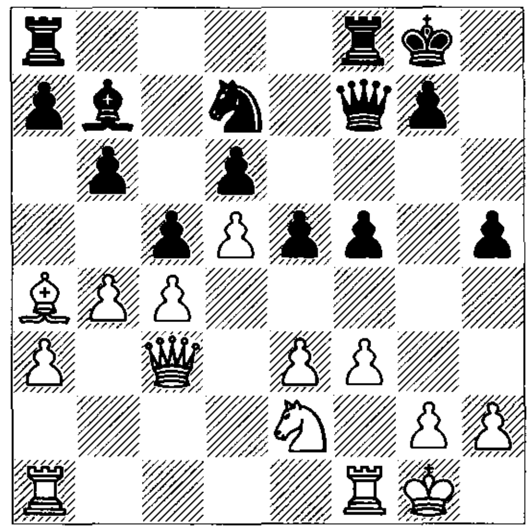
So far both sides have played well but with his next two moves Harrwitz goes astray. He should play 18 ♗c6! here.

18 ♗xd7?! ♕xd7 19 bxc5?!

And here 19 b5 followed by a4-a5 was better. The b-file turns out to fall into Black's hands. From this point on, White is systematically outplayed by Morphy.

19...bxc5 20 f4 e4 21 ♖ab1 ♗a6! 22 ♖fc1 ♕a4!

W



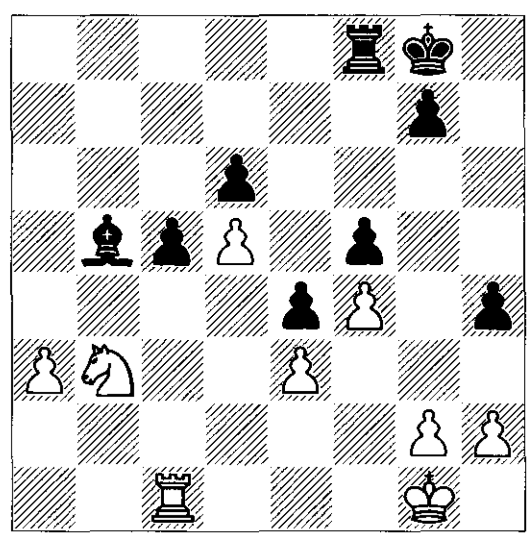
All according to Nimzowitsch's theory, formulated more than 60 years later: a pawn-chain must be attacked at the *base*. That's why it would have been better for White to keep the b-file closed.

23 ♘g3 h4 24 ♘f1 ♖ab8 25 ♘d2 ♖b6!

As White cannot afford just to let Black have the b-file, he has to take on b6, improving Black's pawn-structure.

26 ♖xb6 axb6 27 ♕b3 ♕xb3 28 ♘xb3 b5! 29 cxb5 ♗xb5 *(D)*

W



Now White has weak pawns on a3 and d5.

30 ♘a5 ♖a8 31 ♘b7 ♖a6! 32 ♖c3 ♔f8 33 ♘d8 ♗d7 34 ♖b3 ♔e7 35 ♖b8 c4! 36 ♔f2 c3 37 ♔e2 ♖xa3

Black is winning.

38 ♘c6+ ♗xc6 39 dxc6 c2 40 ♔d2 ♖c3! 41 ♔c1 ♖xc6 42 ♖b3 ♔f6 43 ♖a3 g5 44 g3 hxg3 45 hxg3 gxf4 46 gxf4 ♔g6 47 ♖a5 ♖c5 48 ♖a6 ♖c3 49 ♖xd6+ ♔h5 50 ♖d2 ♔g4 51 ♖g2+ ♔f3 52 ♖g5 ♖c5 53 ♖h5 ♔xe3 54 ♖h4 ♔f3 0-1

Morphy – Harrwitz
Match (game 4), Paris 1858

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 exd4

For some reason, Harrwitz played the much inferior 3...♗g4? in the eighth game of the match. Perhaps he was shaken after four losses in five games.

4 ♕xd4

4 ♘xd4 is at least as good.

4...♘c6 5 ♗b5 ♗d7 6 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 7 ♗g5 f6?!

This hands White a pleasant initiative. The bishop on f8 remains passive forever. Harrwitz's choice is surprising, especially since he managed to win the second game of the match after 7...♘f6 8 ♘c3 ♗e7 9 0-0-0 0-0 10 ♖he1, although White does have a pull here. Best, according to contemporary theory, is 7...♗e7! 8 ♕xg7 ♗f6! and Black equalizes as e4 falls, but this was not yet known at the time.

8 ♗h4 ♘h6 9 ♘c3 ♕d7 10 0-0 ♗e7 11 ♖ad1 0-0 12 ♕c4+ ♖f7?!

12...♔h8 or 12...♘f7 looks more natural.

13 ♘d4

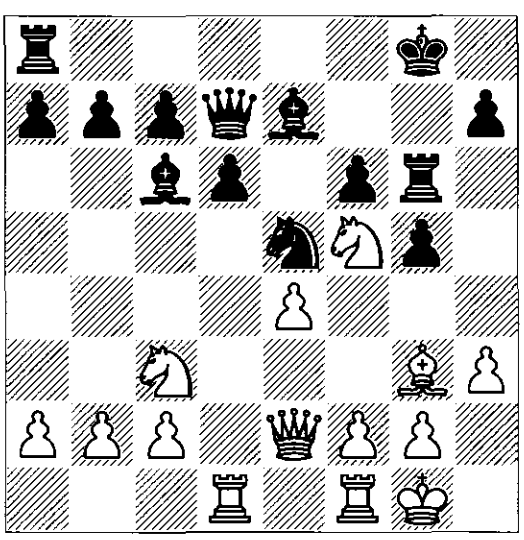
13 e5!? looks strong but as Euwe points out, Black has 13...♕g4!.

13...♘g4 14 h3 ♘e5 15 ♕e2 g5?

Black understandably does not like waiting passively for White's assault by f4 but the text-move just weakens his position. As Nimzowitsch was later to teach the chess world, cramped positions must be relieved slowly.

16 ♗g3 ♖g7 17 ♘f5 ♖g6 *(D)*

W



18 f4! gxf4 19 ♖xf4 ♔h8 20 ♖h4 ♗f8 21 ♗xe5!

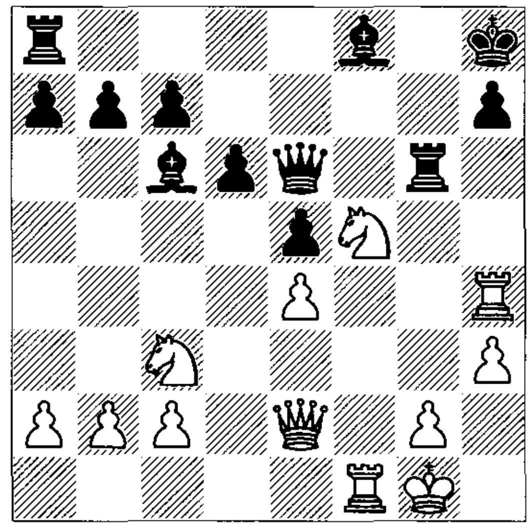
In this closed position, the two knights are superior to the two bishops.

21...fxe5 22 ♖f1 ♕e6 *(D)*

23 ♘b5!

A very nice positional move, played in the spirit of Nimzowitsch's *prophylaxis* – 60 years

W



before this term was invented! Black's idea was to consolidate with 23...♕g8, defending the king and applying pressure on g2 at the same time. 23 ♘b5 is aimed at preventing this set-up. Superficially, it may seem that Black may simply kick home the knight by 23...♕d7, but then White interpolates 24 ♕h5! (Euwe) 24...♔g8 (24...♗xb5 25 ♕xg6 ♗xf1 26 ♔xf1 is disastrous for Black) 25 ♘c3, and the desired black set-up has been prohibited.

23...♕g8?

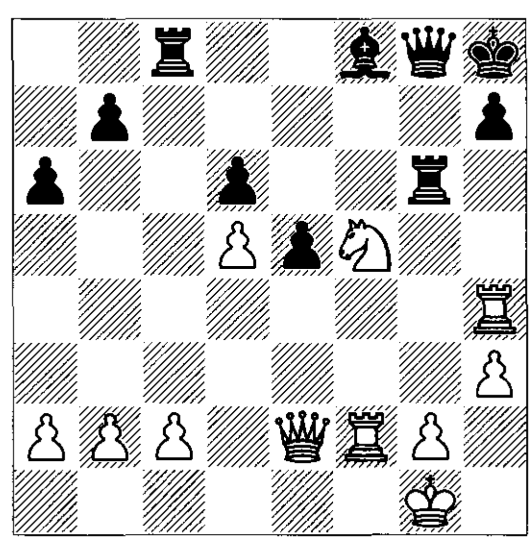
Black insists, but after White's calm defence of g2 he simply loses a pawn.

24 ♖f2!

Again prophylaxis. White *overprotects* g2 – another of Nimzowitsch's notions. 24 ♘xc7 would be met by 24...♖c8, when after 25 ♘d5 (25 ♘b5? ♗xb5 26 ♕xb5 ♖xg2+) 25...♗xd5 26 exd5 ♕xd5 Black has improved his position. However, now he cannot defend c7 as 24...♗xb5 25 ♕xb5 b6 26 ♕d7 is untenable.

24...a6 25 ♘xc7 ♖c8 26 ♘d5 ♗xd5 27 exd5 *(D)*

B



27...♖c7

27...♕xd5 is now met by 28 ♖xh7+! ♔xh7 29 ♕h5+ ♗h6 30 ♘xh6! (better than 30 ♕xg6+

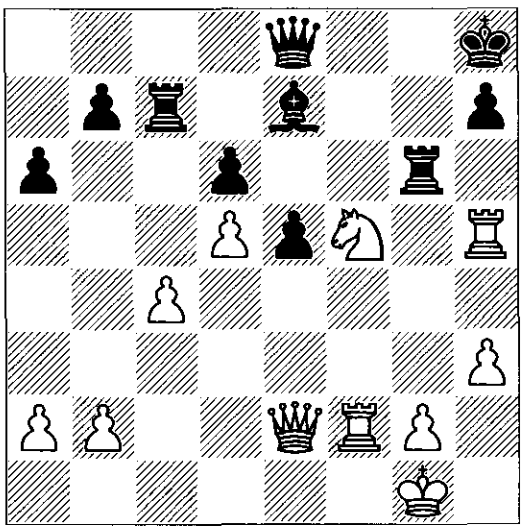
♔xg6 31 ♘e7+ ♔g7 32 ♘xd5 ♖c5! – Euwe) 30...♖xh6 31 ♕f5+ ♖g6 32 ♕xc8 and White wins – but only because g2 is overprotected!

28 c4

Now White is just winning with an extra pawn and an overwhelming position. Morphy wraps it up nicely.

28...♗e7 29 ♖h5 ♕e8 *(D)*

W



30 c5!

The decisive breakthrough. The rook is deflected.

30...♖xc5 31 ♖xh7+! ♔xh7 32 ♕h5+ ♔g8 33 ♘xe7+

The point of 30 c5: the bishop lacks protection by the rook.

33...♔g7 34 ♘f5+!

Stronger than taking the rook.

34...♔g8 35 ♘xd6 1-0

Like Philidor, Morphy was ahead of his time. For Philidor it took a century before his ideas were understood, for Morphy a few decades. Their combined efforts formed the basis for later eras to build on, beginning with the Scientific School fathered by Steinitz.

Romanticism in Modern Chess

The Romantic Era has thus provided the chess world with two important things. First, through the legacies of Philidor and Morphy, a framework to build on for later generations – and second, a number of entertaining openings. While few of the openings used in the 19th century survive the scrutiny of modern opening preparation, from time to time some of them pop up even in grandmaster chess. Garry Kasparov has been one of the frontrunners in dusting old openings off and making them respectable for the modern age. In the 14th game of the fifth 'K-K' match in 1990, Kasparov surprised Karpov by choosing the old Scotch Opening.

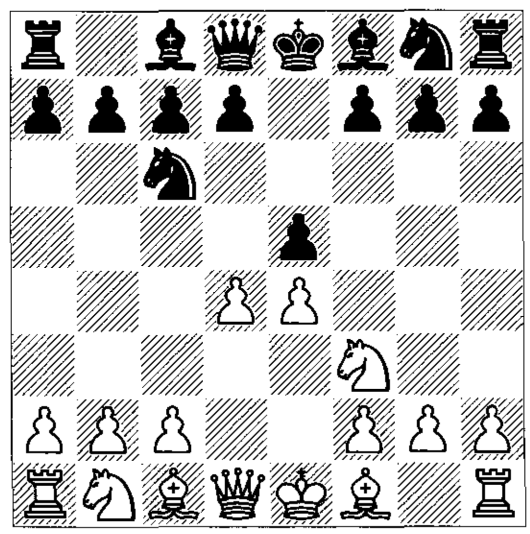
Kasparov – Karpov

World Ch match (game 14), New York/Lyons 1990

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4!? *(D)*

There it is! In most grandmaster games, the Ruy Lopez with 3 ♗b5 is almost automatic.

B



3...exd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘xc6 bxc6 6 e5 ♕e7 7 ♕e2 ♘d5 8 c4 ♗a6

Having survived this game, Karpov probably assumed that the Scotch was a one-off attempt by Kasparov. It wasn't. Two games later he played it again and won an interesting game that ended in a long ending with an extra exchange for White. In that game Karpov preferred 8...♘b6 but was worse after 9 ♘d2 ♕e6 10 b3 a5 11 ♗b2 ♗b4 12 a3 ♗xd2+ 13 ♕xd2 d5 14 cxd5 cxd5 15 ♖c1. In my database I have 23 Kasparov games on the white side of the Scotch: 15 wins and 8 draws!

9 b3 0-0-0

I can only find one game with Kasparov on the black side of the Scotch. Radjabov-Kasparov, Linares 2004 went 9...g6 10 f4 f6 11 exf6 ♕xe2+ 12 ♗xe2 ♗b4+ 13 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 14 ♘xd2 ♘xf4 15 ♖f1 ♘xe2 16 ♔xe2 ♔f7 17 ♔d3 ♖ae8 18 ♖ae1 ♖xe1 19 ♖xe1 ♔xf6 20 ♘e4+ ♔g7 21 ♘c3 ♔f7 22 ♖f1+ ♔e7 23 ♖e1+ ♔f7 24 ♖f1+ ♔e7 25 ♖e1+ ♔d8 26 ♖f1 ♗b7 27 ♘e4, and White's activity and centralization

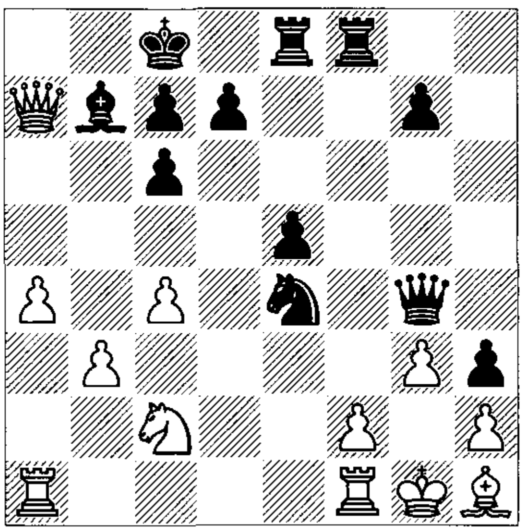
enabled him to save a draw despite the pawn deficit.

10 g3 ♖e8 11 ♗b2 f6 12 ♗g2 fxe5

Black has won a pawn but White has excellent compensation. Black's problem is the eternal insecurity of his king.

13 0-0 h5 14 ♕d2 ♘f6 15 ♕a5 ♗b7 16 ♗a3 ♕e6 17 ♗xf8 ♖hxf8 18 ♕xa7 ♕g4 19 ♘a3 h4 20 ♘c2 h3! 21 ♗h1 ♘e4! 22 a4! *(D)*

B



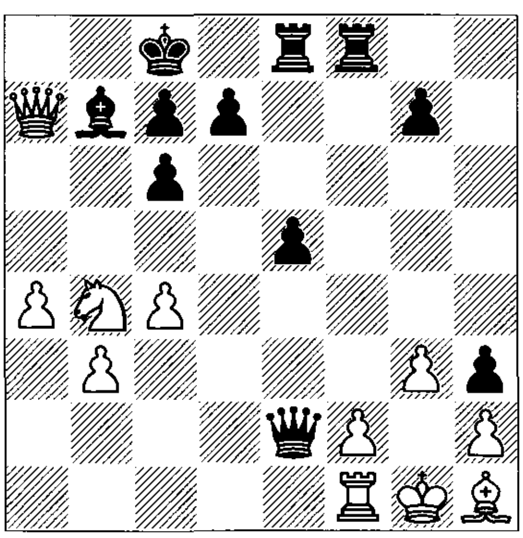
White simply threatens a5-a6 with a win. However, Black is in time to create counterplay against White's king.

22...♘c3!

Threatening 23...♘e2#!

23 ♖ae1 ♘e2+ 24 ♖xe2 ♕xe2 25 ♘b4 *(D)*

B



25...d5!

In this way Black liberates his position.

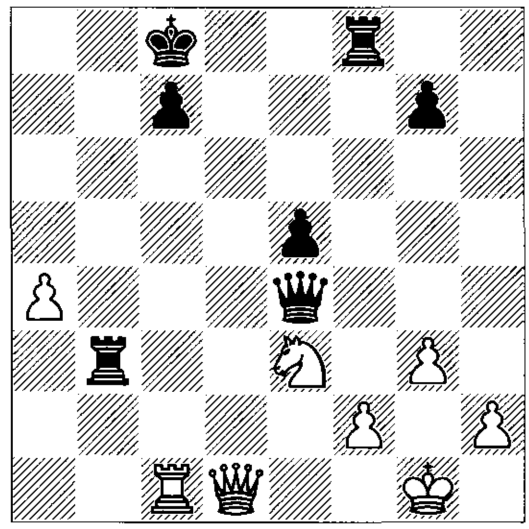
26 cxd5 cxd5 27 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 28 ♘xd5 ♕c2 29 ♕a6+ ♔d7 30 ♘e3

Black's vulnerable king gives White sufficient compensation for the exchange but no more than that.

30...♕e4 31 ♖c1 ♖b8 32 ♕f1! ♖xb3 33 ♕xh3+ ♔d8 34 ♕h5 ♔c8 35 ♕d1 *(D)*

35...♖xe3!

B



Now this exciting game peters out in a draw.

36 fxe3 ♕xe3+ 37 ♔h1 ♕e4+ 38 ♔g1 ♕e3+ 39 ♔h1 ♕e4+ 40 ♔g1 ♖d8 ½-½

When Kasparov started playing the Scotch Opening regularly, he obviously handled it differently from the players of the Romantic Era. The process of 'updating' an ancient opening to modern times consists of looking at it with the knowledge we now have, which means evaluating positional and defensive resources more precisely than 100-150 years ago. Then we might end up with a different way of playing the opening. A good example is the following game in which Kasparov uses the Scotch to win a *positional* struggle based on the superior pawn-structure.

Kasparov – I. Sokolov

Erevan Olympiad 1996

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6

In the new millennium 4...♗c5 seems to be Black's most popular option.

5 ♘xc6

The old continuation 5 ♘c3 ♗b4 6 ♘xc6 bxc6 7 ♗d3 d5 is rarely seen these days – Black is believed to be able to equalize without too much trouble.

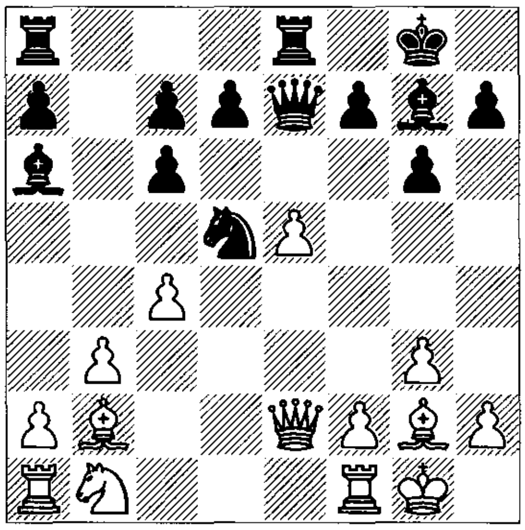
5...bxc6 6 e5 ♕e7 7 ♕e2 ♘d5 8 c4 ♗a6 9 g3 g6 10 b3 ♗g7 11 ♗b2 0-0 12 ♗g2 ♖fe8

An important 'which rook?' decision. The alternative is 12...♖ae8, which seems to have a few small advantages in comparison with Sokolov's choice.

13 0-0 *(D)*

This interesting position has occurred in a number of games over the last 10-15 years. The question is whether the liquidation 13...♗xe5

B



14 ♕xe5 ♕xe5 15 ♗xe5 ♖xe5 16 cxd5 ♗xf1 17 ♔xf1 cxd5 18 ♘c3 (18 f4 ♖e3 19 ♗xd5 ♖ae8 should be OK for Black; note that in the 12...♖ae8 version, Black could play 19...♖d3! here) 18...c6 is tenable for Black. This and the analogous position with the rook on f8 (instead of a8) have been tested in numerous high-level games with players like Leko and especially Rublevsky playing the white side, whereas, e.g., Almasi, Bologan and Nikolić have defended the black side. The jury is still out, but Black seems to be doing reasonably. However, Kasparov no doubt has his own opinion on this matter.

13...♘b6 14 ♖e1 d5

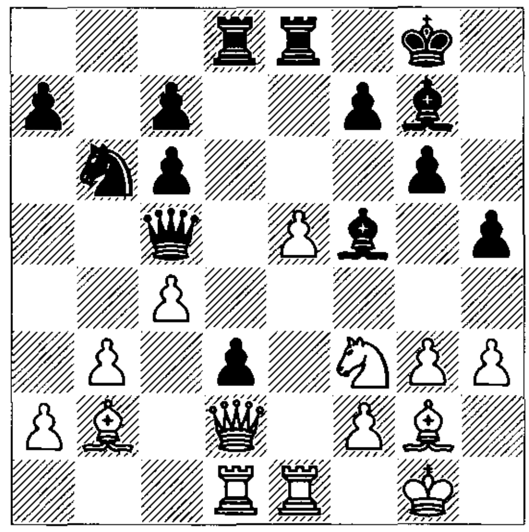
In Ponomariov-Bacrot, Match (game 1), Lausanne 1999, the same position was reached except that Black had played 12...♖ae8 instead of 12...♖fe8. Play continued 14...f6 15 ♕e3 ♕e6 16 ♗a3 ♖f7 17 ♘c3 fxe5 18 ♖ad1 ♗b7 19 ♘e4 ♕f5 20 ♗d6!? ♘c8! 21 ♗xc7 d5, with good central counterplay for Black, who went on to win.

15 ♕c2! ♕c5 16 ♘d2 ♖ad8 17 ♖ac1 d4 18 ♘f3

A new manoeuvring phase begins. White intends to surround the black d-pawn.

18...d3 19 ♕d2 ♗c8 20 h3! h5 21 ♖cd1 ♗f5 *(D)*

W



22 e6?!

A *petite combinaison* that leads to... a clear structural advantage in the spirit of Steinitz rather than in the romantic spirit of Anderssen or Morphy! However, as Nunn's analysis in *Understanding Chess Move by Move* indicates, the advantage may not be enough to win after this move, and Nunn favoured winning a pawn by 22 ♗c3 ♘c8 23 ♘h4 ♘e7 24 ♗b4 ♕d4 25 ♗f1 or 22 ♘h4 ♗e6 23 ♗c3 ♘c8 24 ♕e3.

22...♖xe6

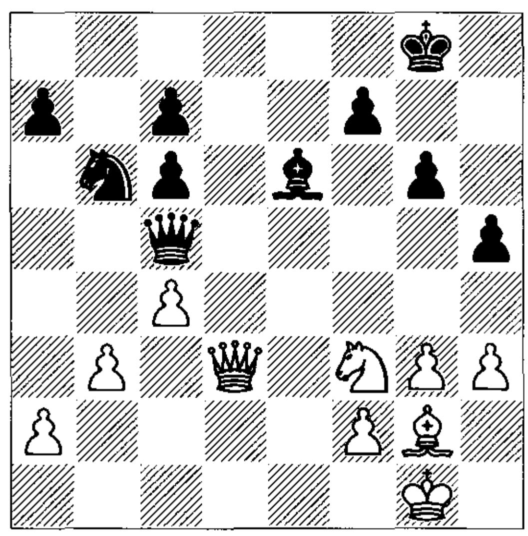
22...fxe6 23 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 24 ♘e5 leaves Black in serious trouble due to the threats of 25 g4 and 25 ♘xc6.

23 ♖xe6 ♗xe6

And here 23...fxe6 is met by 24 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 25 ♕g5!, threatening 26 ♕xd8 and 26 g4.

24 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 25 ♕c3+ ♔g8 26 ♖xd3 ♖xd3 27 ♕xd3 *(D)*

B



This is what comes out of the modern interpretation of the romantic Scotch Opening – a positional edge due to the doubled pawns that Black accepted on move five!

27...♘d7 28 ♕c3?!

According to Nunn, 28 ♕e4 is more accurate.

28...♗f5 29 ♘d4 ♕e5 30 ♕d2 c5 31 ♘xf5 ♕xf5 32 ♕a5!

Black has managed to save the doubled c-pawns but now the a7-pawn drops off instead, leaving White with a passed pawn on the a-file.

32...♘e5 33 ♕xa7 h4?

The decisive mistake. As indicated by Nunn, 33...♘d3! would still offer Black reasonable chances for a draw.

34 ♕a8+ ♔g7 35 ♕e4! ♕f6 36 ♕xh4 1-0

Kasparov also ventured the Evans Gambit on a number of occasions – a tribute to his great predecessors from the Romantic Era! He only played the Evans three times, of which the first was a rapid theme game against Short in London 1993. This game must have inspired both players because Short too later adopted the Evans into his repertoire.

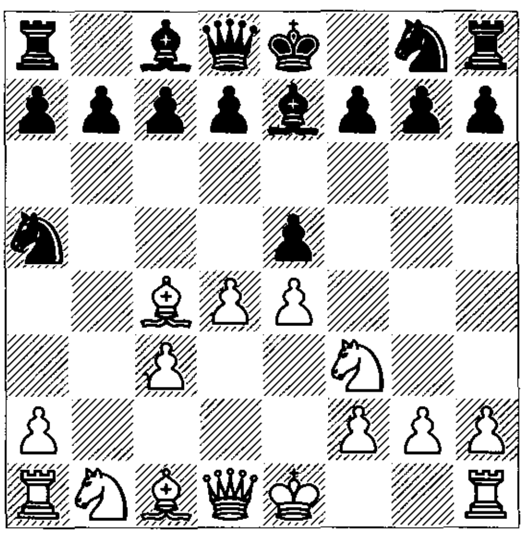
Kasparov – Anand
Riga 1995

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 b4!?

I am sure this must have come as a surprise to Anand. He reacts plausibly, in the same way as Short in the theme game versus Kasparov.

4...♗xb4 5 c3 ♗e7 6 d4 ♘a5 *(D)*

W



7 ♗e2!?

This enterprising move helped revive the Evans. While it was not formally a novelty at the time, Kasparov was the first really strong player to try this move. Later the move was adopted by other super-GMs, including Shirov, Short and Kariakin. The theme game Kasparov-Short instead went 7 ♘xe5 ♘xc4 8 ♘xc4 d5 9 exd5 ♕xd5 10 ♘e3 ♕d8 11 0-0 ♘f6 12 c4 0-0 13 ♘c3 c6 with an edge for White but an eventual draw.

7...exd4 8 ♕xd4!

White's idea becomes apparent: active piece-play in the centre, just like in the Romantic Era!

8...♘f6?!

Today the main line goes 8...d6 (returning the pawn rather than having the knights pushed around the centre) 9 ♕xg7 ♗f6 10 ♕g3 with interesting play; e.g., 10...♘e7 (10...♕e7 is a common alternative, preparing queenside castling) 11 0-0 (11 ♗g5 ♘g6 12 0-0 ♗e6 13 ♘bd2 h6 14 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 15 ♘d4 ♘f4 was fine for Black in Short-Onishchuk, Beijing 2000) 11...♘g6 12 ♘d4 ♕e7 13 ♘d2 ♗d7 14 ♘2b3 ♘xb3 15 axb3 0-0 16 ♗g4! ♔h8 17 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 18 ♖a5! ♖ae8 19 ♖h5 with some initiative for White, Short-I.Sokolov, Sarajevo 2007.

9 e5! ♘c6 10 ♕h4 ♘d5 11 ♕g3 g6

As 11...0-0 is met by 12 ♗h6, Black cannot evacuate his king from the centre.

12 0-0 ♘b6 13 c4! d6 14 ♖d1 ♘d7

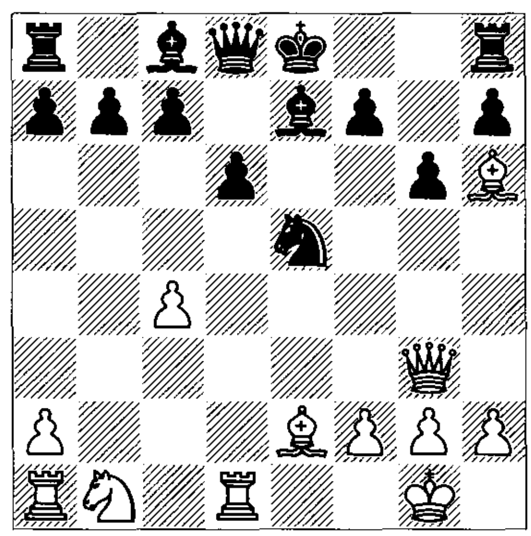
A sad retreat that violates a common principle of opening play: do not move the same piece multiple times. However, Black is hard-pressed to shake off White's pressure in the centre. The text-move asks White's e5-pawn to declare its intentions.

15 ♗h6!

The pawn happily sacrifices its life in the line of duty – rapid development is the highest priority!

15...♘cxe5 16 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 *(D)*

W



17 ♘c3!

Again development is more important than material. 17 ♗g7 ♗f6 18 ♗xh8 ♗xh8 would not be too bad for Black.

17...f6 18 c5! ♘f7 19 cxd6 cxd6

19...♗xd6 is strongly met by 20 ♗b5+ followed by 21 ♖e1+.

20 ♕e3 ♘xh6 21 ♕xh6 ♗f8 22 ♕e3+

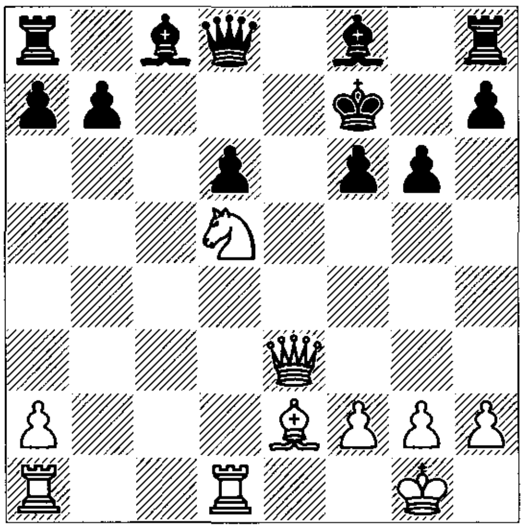
A tough choice – 22 ♕f4!? followed by 23 ♘e4 may be even stronger.

22...♔f7 23 ♘d5! *(D)*

A position that would have pleased Anderssen and Morphy! White's pieces dominate the centre and hunt down Black's exposed king. White's immediate threat is 24 ♖ac1 and 25 ♖c7+.

23...♗e6 24 ♘f4 ♕e7?

B



This loses immediately. 24...♗f5 was necessary, when White possesses a dangerous initiative but still has to crash through.

25 ♖e1! 1-0

Black has no moves; e.g., 25...♕d7 26 ♗b5! ♕xb5 27 ♕xe6+ ♔g7 28 ♘d5 and White wins.

Kasparov – Piket

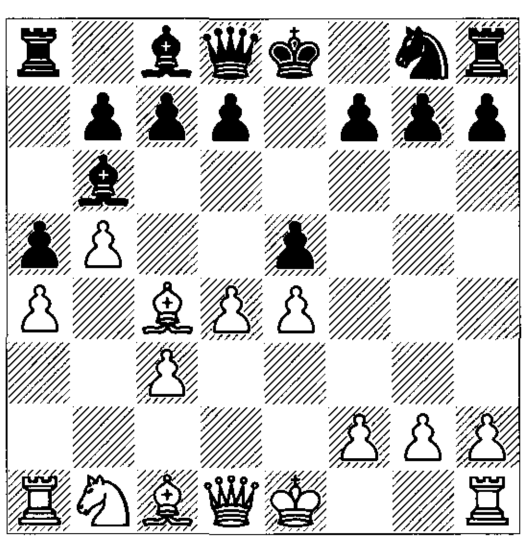
Amsterdam 1995

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 b4 ♗b6?!

Declining the gambit is relatively safe but does not promise full equality. As Steinitz used to say: "Gambits should be refuted by accepting them!"

5 a4 a5 6 b5 ♘d4 7 ♘xd4 ♗xd4 8 c3 ♗b6 9 d4 *(D)*

B



White dominates the centre and thus possesses the initiative.

9...exd4 10 0-0!

Stronger than 10 cxd4, when Black may consider 10...d5!? with the idea 11 ♗xd5 ♘e7, and White has trouble with his d4-pawn.

10...♘e7

10...dxc3 11 ♘xc3 looks excessively risky due to White's lead in development.

11 ♗g5! h6 12 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 13 cxd4 ♕d6!?

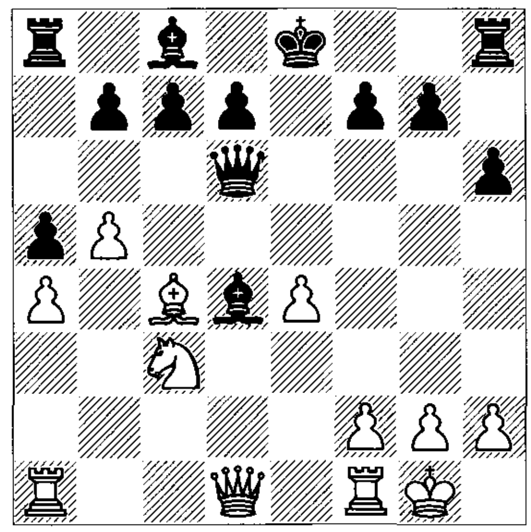
A brave decision born out of necessity. 13...0-0 14 ♘c3 is just very good for White.

14 ♘c3!

Again, development is the highest priority.

14...♗xd4 *(D)*

W



15 ♘d5! ♗xa1

Taking the bait looks natural, but perhaps Black can consider maintaining some control of the dark squares by 15...♗e5.

16 ♕xa1 0-0?

Surprisingly, this natural continuation causes Black's downfall. It was crucial to fight for the dark squares by 16...f6!. Given Black's vulnerable king and lagging development, White certainly has compensation for his material investment, but Black is still in the game. A possible – certainly not forced – variation is 17 ♖d1 ♖b8 (getting ready to kick White's knight by ...c6) 18 e5!? fxe5 19 ♘e3 ♕f6 20 ♘d5 ♕d6 21 ♘e3, with a repetition of moves. White has many ways to play on instead, but there is no absolutely clear knockout blow.

17 e5! ♕c5 18 ♖c1!

White's lead in development and central dominance more than compensate for the material deficit. In fact, Black is in deep trouble as he has no good squares for his queen.

18...c6 19 ♗a2 ♕a3

This loses a whole rook but 19...♕a7 20 b6 ♕b8 21 ♘c7 is sad.

20 ♘b6! d5

White had a simple double threat: 21 ♗xf7+ and 21 ♘xa8.

21 ♘xa8 ♔h8 22 ♘b6 ♗e6 23 h3 ♖d8 24 bxc6 bxc6 25 ♖c3 ♕b4 26 ♖xc6 ♖b8 27 ♘xd5 ♕xa4 28 ♖c1 ♕a3 29 ♗c4 1-0

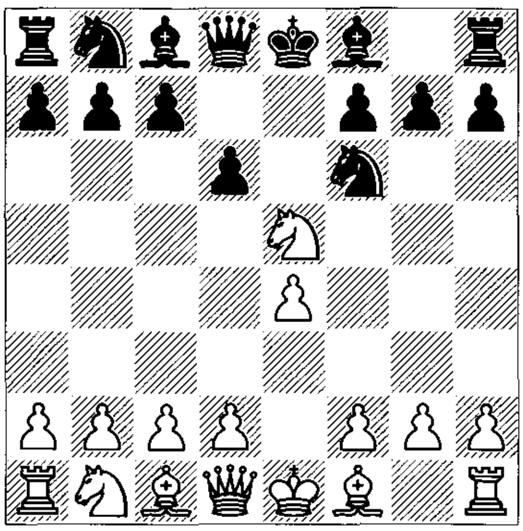
The Evans Gambit has not lost its sting!

One of the key characteristics of the Romantic Era was the willingness to sacrifice material for the initiative – even early in the game. This feature is still occasionally seen today even in games at the highest level.

Topalov – Kramnik
Linares 1999

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 ♘xe5 d6 *(D)*

W



4 ♘xf7!?

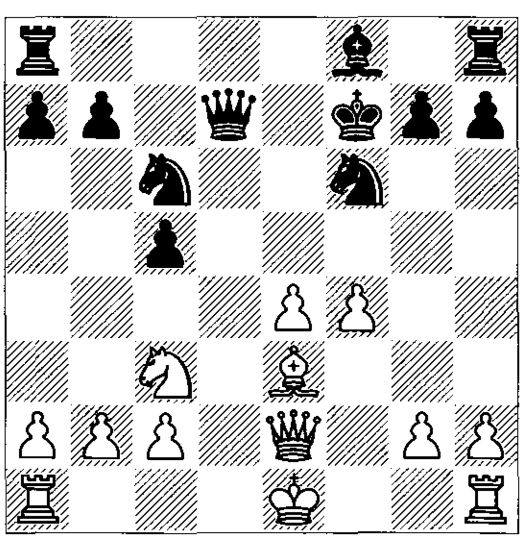
Veselin Topalov, together with Alexander Morozevich, is undoubtedly the boldest player in modern top chess. This sacrifice of a knight for two pawns is considered rather speculative.

4...♔xf7 5 ♘c3 c5

Preventing White from setting up a pawn phalanx in the centre with d4 and f4.

6 ♗c4+ ♗e6 7 ♗xe6+ ♔xe6 8 d4 ♔f7 9 dxc5 ♘c6 10 ♕e2 ♕d7 11 ♗e3 dxc5 12 f4! *(D)*

B



White's central preponderance assures him of compensation for the sacrificed piece.

12...♖e8 13 e5 ♘g4 14 ♖d1 ♕f5 15 0-0 h5!

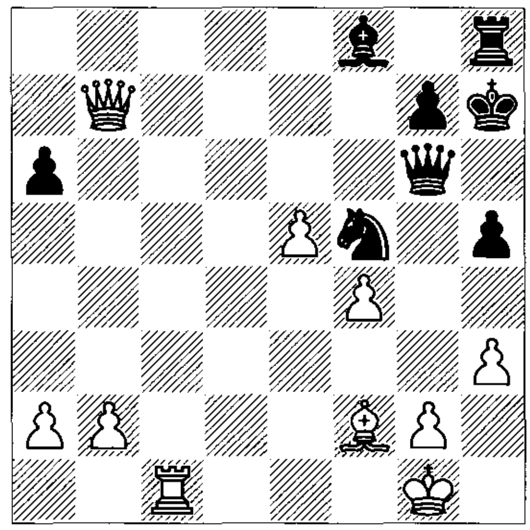
Kramnik is a great connoisseur of Nimzowitsch's teachings. With this move he restrains the advance of White's kingside pawns by h3 and g4.

16 ♗c1 ♘d4 17 ♕c4+ ♔g6 18 h3 ♘h6 19 ♘b5!

Black should not be given any time to calmly coordinate his pieces.

19...a6 20 ♘xd4 cxd4 21 ♕xd4 ♖c8 22 ♕b6+ ♔h7 23 ♕xb7 ♖xc2 24 ♗e3 ♕g6 25 ♖c1 ♖xc1 26 ♖xc1 ♘f5 27 ♗f2 *(D)*

B



27...h4!

Black secures a square on g3 for the knight and sets up the drawing mechanism that concludes the game peacefully.

28 ♖c7 ♘g3 29 ♔h2 ♘f1+ 30 ♔g1 ♕b1! 31 ♗xh4 ♗c5+! ½-½

32 ♖xc5 ♘g3+ 33 ♔h2 (not 33 ♔f2? ♘e4+, when the rook on c5 hangs – that is the idea behind 31...♗c5+) 33...♘f1+ is a draw through repetition.

From a learning point of view, the Romantic Era is probably the least important of the seven eras of chess history. However, what the era may lack in learning potential, it holds in artistic beauty. In no other era have chess and chessplayers been so cherished by the public – chessplayers like Morphy and Anderssen were admired and treated like true artists. The Romantic Era is mainly that – an ancient romantic time in which beauty and bravery came before science and technique. We, centuries later, should remember the beautiful attacks of that time and for a moment forget the flaws in defence – until we sit down at the board to play.

I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them.
PABLO PICASSO

2 The Scientific Era

[Management can be made] a true science, resting upon clearly defined laws, rules and principles as a foundation.
FREDERICK WINSLOW TAYLOR

With the advent of the *Scientific School*, chess entered the modern era. An era in which 'scientific laws' were to revolutionize chess, just as similar advances at the time revolutionized other fields. Substitute 'chess' for 'management' and 'Wilhelm Steinitz' for 'Frederick Winslow Taylor' in the quote above, and you have a grasp of what the Scientific School is about. Interestingly, as I am discussing in a forthcoming management book, chess thinkers actually beat management thinkers by being first to introduce a number of strategic concepts that were only later adopted in management.

The founding father of the Scientific School was Wilhelm Steinitz, the first official World Champion (1886-94). It was not really the fact that Steinitz was World Champion that made him such an important figure in chess history – although of course his successes at the board gave him an excellent platform for presenting his ideas. His legacy derives much more from the fact that he founded *positional chess* and initiated a giant leap forward in the understanding of the game. Before Steinitz, in the days of the Romantic Era, chess games were mainly won by 'tactical strokes of genius'. After Steinitz, they were won by superior strategic understanding of the basic features of the game. From being a mainly tactically oriented game, chess became strategic – that is, the collection of small advantages, long-range planning and systematic logic superseded creative vision, tactical ability and beautiful sacrifices. Not that these features of chess disappeared; as with all the subsequent shifts in the understanding of chess, one paradigm builds upon the previous one and moves chess to a new level. However, Steinitz showed that the beautiful combinations of the Romantic Era did not derive from 'strokes of genius' among talented individual players – rather they evolved logically from the flow of the game. If one player has an advantage, combinations appear logically as a *consequence of the advantage*. On the other hand, Steinitz said, if the position is bad, combinations and tactics are bound to fail. An unfounded attack – void of any positional foundation – will never be successful against a careful defence. That is against the very nature of the game. Thus strategy and positional play must precede tactics and combinations. Steinitz earned his place in chess history by developing the strategic foundation on which positional play must be built.

Steinitz's Theories

Steinitz developed a theory of positional chess which is valid to this day, although of course our understanding of the game has evolved during the time that has passed – approaching a century and a half – since Steinitz first formulated his theories. Some of Steinitz's theories have proven dogmatic or even flawed (for example, his contention that "the king is a strong piece, even early in the game!"), but in general his work has stood the test of time. Let us look into his theories in a little more detail.

The Concept of Advantage

At the heart of the Scientific School's approach to chess is the understanding of the concept of *advantage*. A game of chess starts in an equilibrium – at least that is the assumption by the experts, although this still needs to be proven – and this equilibrium is potentially disturbed with any decision and move by one of the players. If both sides consistently play good moves, the equilibrium is not disturbed and the most natural outcome of the game is a draw. However, humans make mistakes, and when a mistake is made, the equilibrium is disturbed and

the other side gains an advantage. Sometimes the advantage is not enough to win, though, as the drawing range in chess is rather large. Therefore players must consistently aim at collecting more small advantages, until the advantage is big enough to win the game. At the same time a player must always be ready to *trade* one advantage for another, hopefully bigger, one. That is what Capablanca termed the *transformation of advantages* (see later). As I discussed in *Foundations of Chess Strategy* and *How Chess Games are Won and Lost*, basically all advantages fall into one of three categories: *material*, *initiative* and *positional factors*.

The most forcing advantage is a *material advantage*. If a player is ahead on material (*absolute force*), he will usually win the game. The material factor is also connected to *exchanges*; often we see advantages change hands due to flawed exchanges; for example, swapping a strong knight for a bad bishop or vice versa. The most significant exchange is that of queens, and therefore one must always carefully weigh the consequences of a queen exchange. However, as we know from practice, sometimes material is not the deciding factor – we have all seen beautiful games, including some from the Romantic Era, in which one side sacrificed all his pieces and still mated with limited material left. The material superiority did not help the defending side. So there are other types of advantage in chess apart from material.

The most visible of these other advantages is the *initiative*, which can be further subdivided into categories like *relative force* (both sides have the same number of pieces but one is, e.g., standing idle in the corner with no influence on the game), *deployment speed* (how quickly new troops can join the battle), *coordination of pieces* (their synergy effects; e.g., a blockading knight which is active in both attack and defence) and *king's position* (who has the safer king). Often having a strong initiative can offset material considerations, which is the driving force behind sacrifices.

The last type of advantage is the *positional* one. This is the most profound, and also the one that makes chess 'strategic'. Usually it is in the understanding of positional factors that strong and experienced players tend to have the upper hand over less experienced players. 'Suddenly', or so it seems, the stronger player has a positional advantage and the game is no longer in equilibrium. However, positional advantages do not appear out of nowhere; they are the outcome of sound chess strategy, and the Scientific School – with Steinitz and later Tarrasch – set out to explain basic chess strategy to the wider audience. Sub-categories of positional advantage include *space*, *pawn-structure*, *control of key files and squares* and *control of the centre*. It is in the description of the positional factors that Steinitz and the Scientific School has had the largest impact. For the first time the chess world obtained a framework for understanding and improving positional play. Although Steinitz is the one that (rightly) gets credited as the founder of the Scientific School, for many it was Tarrasch who brought his theories to a wider audience through his books and articles; e.g., *300 Schachpartien* and *Die Moderne Schachpartie*. Let us now delve into some of the fundamental elements of the Scientific School framework.

Pawn-Structure

One of the key elements of positional play is the *pawn-structure*. Steinitz built on Philidor here, who had a century earlier proclaimed the pawns to be "the soul of chess". However, in the midst of the Romantic Era, the Frenchman was not heard by the general chess enthusiast, who wanted fireworks on the board. That changed with Steinitz. The pawn-structure is in itself of vital importance for the evaluation of the positional features of a position, but it is also indirectly involved in shaping a number of the other elements. For example, space is gained by advancing pawns (but exploited by pieces having greater freedom of movement), and the determination of which squares and files are 'critical' and must be controlled depends very much on the pawn-structure. So does the battle for the centre, although this was one of the points of Steinitz's theory that was later challenged by the Hypermodern School, as we shall see in the next chapter.

As discussed by Euwe and Nunn in their instructive work *The Development of Chess Style*, Steinitz sub-divided the pawn-structure into three categories: the *connected* pawns (the

ideal), the *isolated* pawn (weak) and the *doubled* pawns (a potential strategic weakness). In a game from my early career, I learned a valuable lesson about pawn weaknesses.

Sosonko – L.B. Hansen
Amsterdam 1989

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 ♗b4+ 4 ♗d2 ♕e7 5 ♘f3 b6

Later I have been much more successful with 5...♘c6 in this line of the Bogo-Indian, intending to block the centre on the dark squares with ...d6 and ...e5.

6 ♗g2 ♗b7 7 0-0 ♗xd2 8 ♕xd2 0-0 9 ♘c3 ♘e4?!

9...d6 is more solid and probably better.

10 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 11 ♕f4!

A strong move that forces Black's next, as otherwise c7 hangs. However, now White has easy play against Black's *weak c-pawn*.

11...d5 12 ♖ac1 ♘a6 13 cxd5 ♗xd5

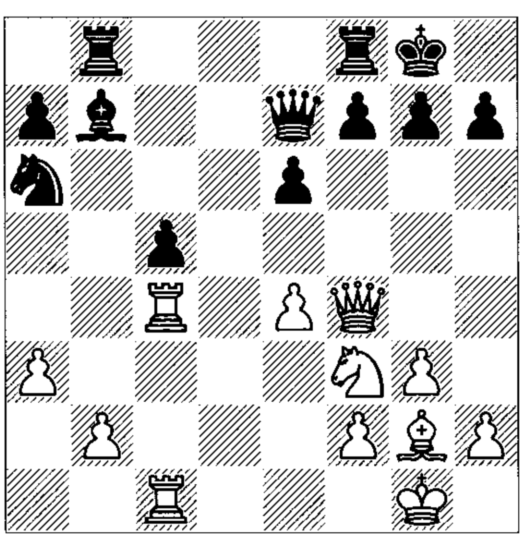
13...exd5 is strongly met by 14 ♖c6!.

14 a3 c5 15 dxc5 bxc5

Black has to accept an *isolated pawn*, as 15...♘xc5 16 b4 is unpleasant. White controls the open files and has a potential outpost at c6.

16 e4 ♗b7 17 ♖c4 ♖ab8 18 ♖fc1 *(D)*

B



An instructive position. Going into it, I had superficially judged this to be OK for Black, as I thought the b2-pawn would be as much a target as c5. However, that is not the case. It is much easier for White to cover the b-pawn than it is for Black to cover the c-pawn. To defend the c-pawn, Black must leave his knight stranded at a6, where it is very far from the action. White, on the other hand, can attack c5 with a rook while this same rook covers the b-pawn. That is, there is a *synergy effect* here for White – the rook performs two tasks at once. That is not the case for the black knight. Notice how the flaws in the pawn-structure fall back on the mobility of the pieces. While Black may hold, his position is unpleasant.

18...♗c6 19 ♘e5 ♗b5 20 ♖4c3 f6 21 ♘f3 e5 22 ♕e3 ♖fd8 23 b3 ♕b7 24 ♕e1 ♗d7 25 ♗f1!

White slowly manoeuvres with his pieces while Black can only defend. The inactive knight on a6 requires constant protection but cannot move due to the pawn weakness.

25...♗b5 26 h4! h5?!

This creates another weakness but it was also unpleasant to allow h5 and ♘h4-f5.

27 ♗xb5 ♕xb5 28 ♕f1 ♕xf1+ 29 ♔xf1 ♖b6 30 ♔e2 ♘b8

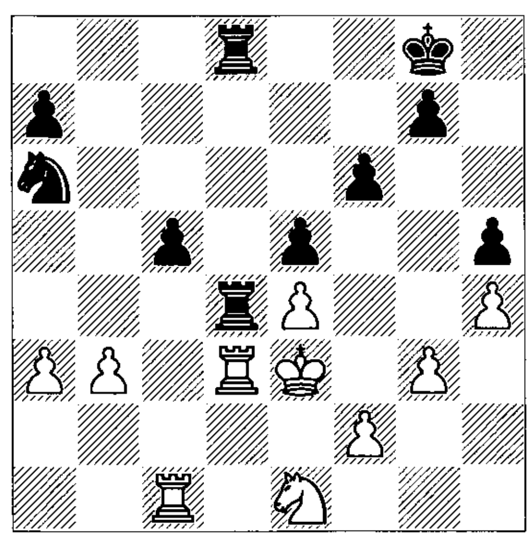
Finally the knight moves but soon it will have to return to a6.

31 ♔e3 ♖bd6

The desirable 31...♘c6 (planning 32...♘d4) is unfortunately not possible due to 32 b4!.

32 ♘e1 ♘a6 33 ♖d3 ♖d4 *(D)*

W



34 f4!

In accordance with the principles of strategic endgames, White creates a second weakness.

34...exf4+ 35 gxf4 ♖xd3+ 36 ♘xd3 ♖b8 37 ♖c3!

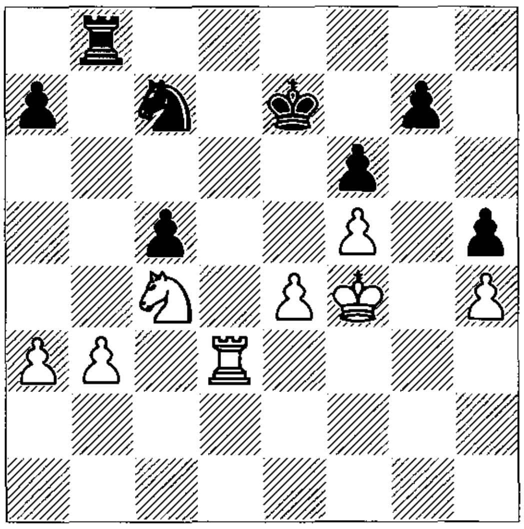
Again the rook is able to perform two tasks at once, while the black knight is still stranded on a6.

37...♔f7 38 f5! ♔e7 39 ♔f4 ♔d6 40 ♘b2 ♔c6 41 ♘d3 ♔d6 42 ♘b2 ♔e7 43 ♖g3 ♔f7 44 ♖d3 ♔e7 45 ♘c4 ♘c7 *(D)*

46 e5!

After patient manoeuvres – there is no need to hurry in such positions – White initiates the final central advance.

W



46...♖d8

After 46...fxe5+? 47 ♘xe5 White penetrates on d7, as 47...♖d8? loses to 48 ♘c6+. However, the knight ending is lost as Black has too many weaknesses.

47 ♖xd8 ♔xd8 48 ♔e4 ♔d7 49 a4 ♔e7 50 ♘e3 ♔d7 51 ♘g2!

Going after the h5-pawn.

51...♘e8 52 ♘f4 fxe5 53 ♔xe5

Finally White's positional superiority is about to be translated into a tangible material advantage. Black cannot prevent the loss of a pawn, since 53...♘f6 is met by 54 ♘e6, hitting c5 and g7.

53...♘d6 54 ♘xh5 c4 55 bxc4 ♘xc4+ 56 ♔f4 a5 57 ♘xg7 ♔e7 58 h5 ♔f7 59 ♘e6 ♘b6 60 h6 ♔g8 61 f6 1-0

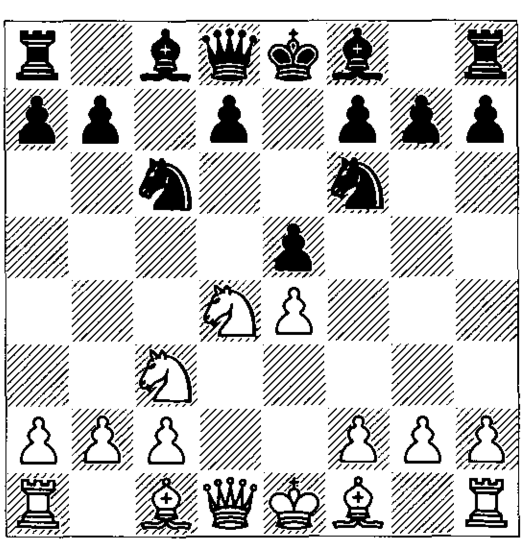
Although chess these days is much more concrete, the pawn-structure remains a defining feature of the game.

Leko – Radjabov

Morelia/Linares 2008

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e5!? *(D)*

W



This move probably made Steinitz turn in his grave. Black voluntarily weakens the d5-square and makes the d-pawn a backward pawn. It was first played by his successor Emanuel Lasker in the 9th game of the World Championship match against Schlechter in 1910. For many years it was known as Lasker's Hunt Variation, although the 2nd World Champion to my knowledge never used it again. In the first opening book that I ever read, Bent Larsen's *Opening Play in Chess* from 1965 (in Danish), Larsen commented that the variation is "hardly completely correct". However, in the late 1960s and 1970s, two later grandmasters from Cheliabinsk, Evgeny Sveshnikov and Gennady Timoshchenko, started analysing and playing this variation again. Today it is an accepted part of modern opening theory. This variation (especially 8...b5) is now generally known as the Sveshnikov Variation (though the more traditional name Pelikan Variation is still in use), and is a good example of the *New Dynamism* paradigm that emerged after World War II – see Chapter 4.

6 ♘db5

Schlechter played the insipid 6 ♘b3 in the variation's inaugural game against Lasker.

6...d6 7 ♗g5 a6 8 ♘a3 b5 9 ♘d5

In recent years this has emerged as the main line. Earlier 9 ♗xf6 gxf6 (9...♕xf6?! 10 ♘d5) 10 ♘d5 was more popular, but Black gets active play in the centre by 10...f5.

9...♗e7 10 ♗xf6!

When fighting for squares – in this case d5 – a knight is often better than a bishop.

10...♗xf6 11 c3 0-0 12 ♘c2 ♗g5 13 a4!

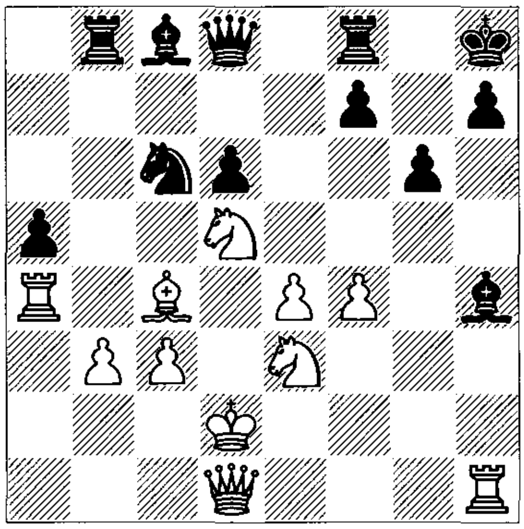
In the spirit of Steinitz, White creates a weak black a-pawn.

13...bxa4 14 ♖xa4 a5 15 ♗c4 ♖b8 16 b3 ♔h8 17 ♘ce3 ♗xe3!?

I am no expert on this line but this seems somewhat peculiar to me. I would prefer to keep the two bishops. However, it has been played by the former FIDE World Champion Alexander Khalifman (a major theoretician) and now by Radjabov, and they usually know what they are doing! However, in this game Leko shows the drawbacks of Black's strategy: the pawn-structure is somewhat weak. The alternative to 17...♗xe3 is 17...g6, which has been played in a number of games and leads to crazy

positions after 18 h4!? ♗xh4 19 g3 ♗g5 20 f4 (or 20 ♕e2 f5 21 f4, Kariakin-Shirov, FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2007) 20...exf4 21 gxf4 ♗h4+ 22 ♔d2 *(D)*.

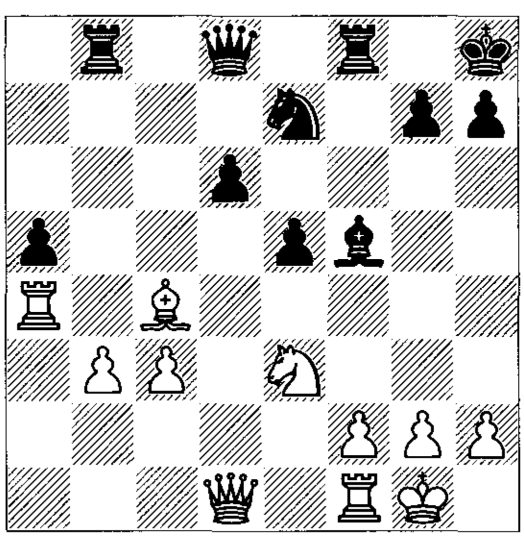
B



What a position! White sacrifices a pawn and then voluntarily walks around the centre with his king! However, in return he intends to mate Black down the h-file... This position has been reached in high-level encounters such as Topalov-Leko, Linares 2005 and Yakovenko-Shirov, Foros 2007, and the latest stance of theory seems to be that Black is doing fine. By the way, Steinitz sometimes liked to do something similar – the variation 1 e4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 f4 exf4 4 d4 ♕h4+ 5 ♔e2 is known as the Steinitz Gambit.

18 ♘xe3 ♘e7 19 0-0 f5 20 exf5 ♗xf5 *(D)*

W

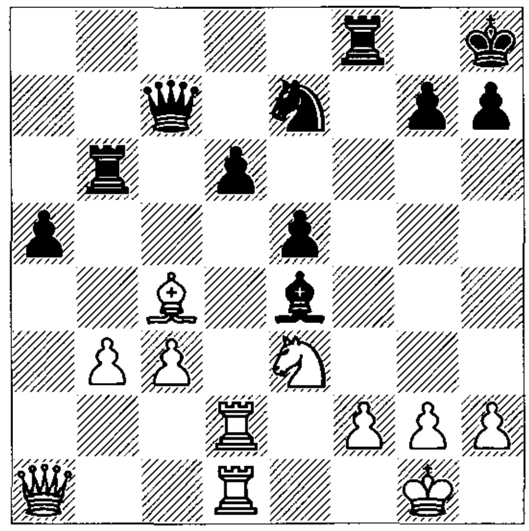


21 ♖a2!

White regroups his rook to d2 to exert pressure on the backward d6-pawn. One of the problems with having such a backward pawn is not just that it is weak in itself; the square in front of it (in this case d5) is also vulnerable.

21...♗e4 22 ♖d2 ♖b6 23 ♖e1 ♕b8 24 ♕a1 ♕c7 25 ♖ed1 *(D)*

B



Why is White better here? Because of the pawn-structure. Black has three pawn-islands vs White's two, and a5 and d6 are both weak vs only b3 in the white camp. Black's best bet is to obtain a position with two against three on the kingside – that is, giving up a5, d6 and e5 for b3 and c3. That could be a draw, depending on which pieces are left on the board.

25...h6 26 h3 ♗b7 27 ♕a3 ♖d8 28 ♗e6!

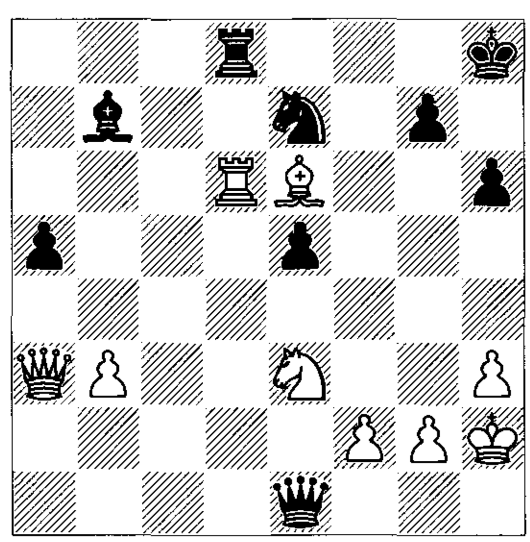
White threatens to tighten the screws by 29 c4 so Black feels he has to act. Since 28...d5 29 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 30 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 (30...♕xc3 31 ♗f7!) 31 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 32 ♖xd5 ♕xc3 33 ♕f8+ ♔h7 34 ♕f5+ ♖g6 35 g3! seems pretty hopeless for Black – the threats are 36 ♖d6 and/or 36 h4 – Black goes after the c3-pawn, but it turns out badly.

28...♕xc3?! 29 ♖xd6 ♖bxd6

Black could try 29...♖dxd6 30 ♖xd6 ♕b4!?, but White wins after 31 ♕xb4 ♖xb4 32 ♖d8+ ♔h7 33 ♖e8 ♘g6 34 ♗g8+ ♔h8 35 ♘f5 ♖b6 36 ♖b8.

30 ♖xd6 ♕e1+ 31 ♔h2 *(D)*

B



31...♖e8

Black's problem is that after 31...♖xd6 32 ♕xd6 his king also comes under fire – a good

example of Capablanca's transformation of advantages! However, the text-move loses a piece.

32 ♖d7! ♘c6 33 ♗f7! ♖a8

33...♖b8 loses to 34 ♖xb7! ♖xb7 35 ♕f8+ and mate.

34 ♖xb7 ♕xf2 35 ♗d5 ♖c8 36 ♖f7 ♕xe3 37 ♗xc6 1-0

37...♖xc6 38 ♕f8+ mates. A model positional game by Leko. Of the contemporary top players, Leko is probably the one whose style most clearly reflects Steinitz's teachings.

Another key element that Steinitz discusses in relation to the pawn-structure is the *queenside majority.* Euwe and Nunn, in *The Development of Chess Style*, explain the strategies of the two sides well: "The majority of pawns on the side not occupied by one's own king is a very important weapon in the middlegame. Such a majority can be advanced rapidly without any danger to one's own king ... The defending side must then strive to launch a kingside attack with the object of delaying the advance of the queenside majority by indirect means or else reduce the game to an ending before the said majority has yielded a dangerous passed pawn; it will then be possible for the kingside majority also to advance quickly without danger, thus establishing equilibrium." These comments, which I presume originate from Euwe's original book from 1968 which John Nunn later updated, clearly carry the mark of the Scientific School, to which the former Dutch World Champion (1935-7) belongs. Notice the somewhat dogmatic approach – "when defending against a pawn-majority, you only have two options, counterattack or liquidation into an ending". Today we have a more nuanced view on these things. For example, Nimzowitsch taught us that another defensive measure against the pawn-majority is *restrain, blockade* and *destroy,* while modern grandmasters are much more pragmatic and willing to move pawns in front of their own king's position even in the middlegame. Euwe seems to assume that such pawn advances are always bad, and it is such dogmas that modern grandmasters challenge in the present era of Creative Concreteness.

Vladimir Kramnik is an expert in handling the queenside majority. Here is a typical example.

Kramnik – Gelfand

Dortmund 2007

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 e3 ♘bd7 6 ♕c2 ♗d6 7 e4

An old line in the Semi-Slav. The main theoretical discussion these days revolves around Shabalov's 7 g4!?.

7...♘xe4 8 ♘xe4 dxe4 9 ♕xe4 c5

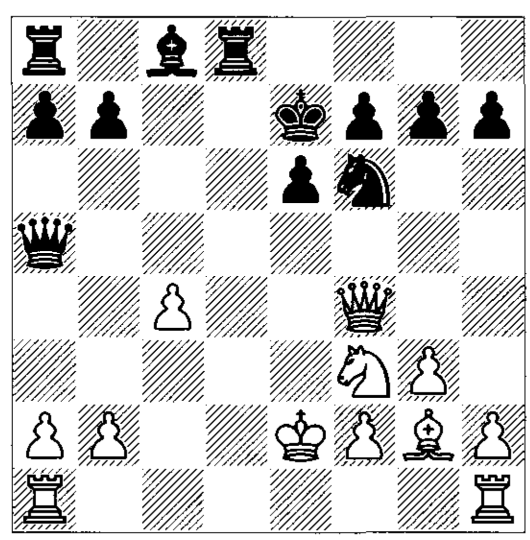
Black has a number of alternatives here, the most enterprising being 9...e5 10 dxe5 0-0!? 11 exd6! ♖e8 12 ♕xe8+ ♕xe8+ 13 ♗e3, when White has more than adequate compensation for the queen, as has been borne out in a number of games from the early 1980s. The text-move is regarded Black's most solid choice.

10 ♗g5 ♗e7 11 ♗xe7 ♕a5+! 12 ♔e2!?

12 ♘d2 doesn't bring White much. Now both sides will have their king placed in the centre, but it doesn't really matter here as the game is entering quiet positional patterns with no risk of an assault on the uncastled king.

12...♔xe7 13 g3! cxd4 14 ♗g2 ♘f6 15 ♕xd4 ♖d8 16 ♕f4 *(D)*

B



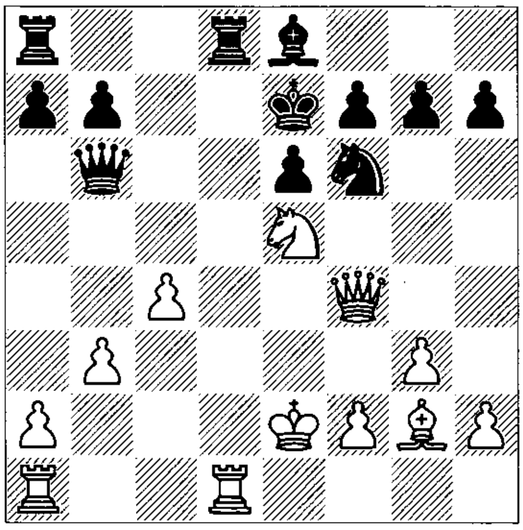
The opening is over and we are approaching a very significant phase in chess – the transition from opening to middlegame. The key element in the position is White's queenside pawn-majority, and in the next few moves we see the strategic battle revolving around this theme. White has an edge but Black should be able to defend.

16...♗d7 17 ♘e5 ♗e8 18 ♖hd1 ♕b6 19 b3 *(D)*

19...♖xd1?!

Gelfand follows Euwe's recipe of striving for an endgame but in Kramnik's opinion this is an inaccuracy. In his notes in *New In Chess,*

B

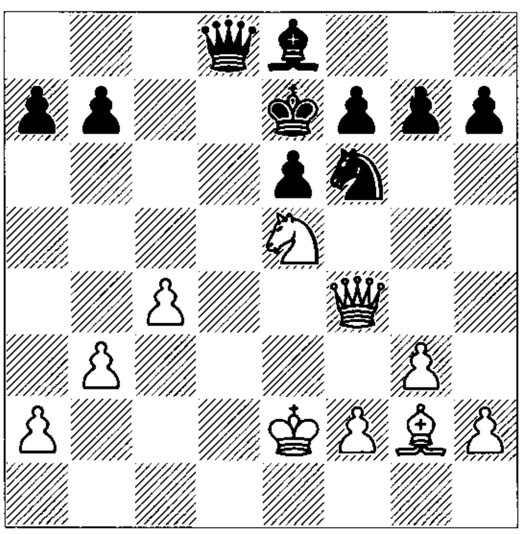


Kramnik suggests the waiting move 19...♖ac8. The point is that it is not easy for White to push the pawns – they are well *restrained* on the dark squares.

20 ♖xd1 ♖d8 21 ♖xd8 ♕xd8 *(D)*

21...♔xd8 is unpleasant after 22 ♘d3 with threats like 23 ♕b8+ or 23 ♕g5 (Kramnik).

W



The recapture with the queen only temporarily gives up a pawn. White more or less has to take – Kramnik's comments that "if Black manages to play ...b6, he will be very close to a draw". Here we see the influence of Nimzowitsch: Black intends to set up a *restraining* defence on the dark squares which Kramnik apparently does not think that White can break down.

22 ♗xb7 ♕a5! 23 ♕e3

White cannot hold on to the pawn, as after 23 a4 Black has the tactical shot 23...♕b6 24 ♕f3 ♗xa4! 25 bxa4 ♕b2+ 26 ♔f1 ♕xe5 with only a minimal plus for White according to Kramnik.

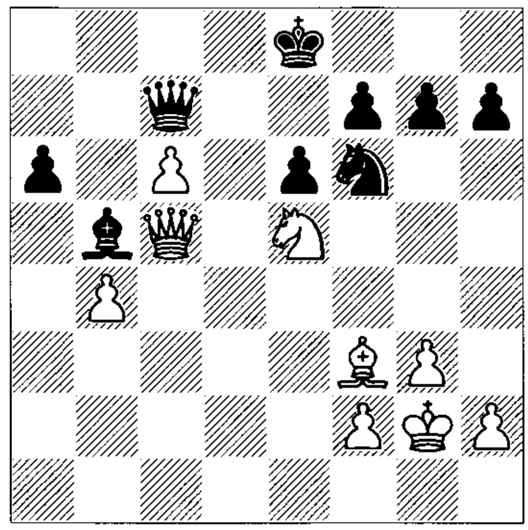
23...♕xa2+ 24 ♔f1 ♕a5 25 ♗f3 ♕b6 26 c5

White has retained a small advantage, since he is able to push his passed c-pawn, whereas Black's kingside pawn-majority is not worth much in the offensive sense. Still, it is not clear if White has enough to win.

26...♗b5+ 27 ♔g2 ♕c7 28 c6 a6 29 ♕c5+ ♔e8 30 b4! *(D)*

This innocuous-looking move actually introduces a major threat – 31 ♘c4 ♗xc4 32 ♕xc4, and a6 falls. On the other hand, the direct 30 ♘c4 is premature as Black then has 30...♗xc4 31 ♕xc4 a5!, restraining White on the dark squares. Attention to such small details is crucial in this type of positional struggle.

B



30...♘d5!

Gelfand finds the best defence. By again temporarily giving up a pawn, he manages to neutralize White's c6-pawn. However, he is still struggling as we now see a classic example of the *transformation of advantages*.

31 ♗xd5 exd5

31...♕xe5? 32 c7.

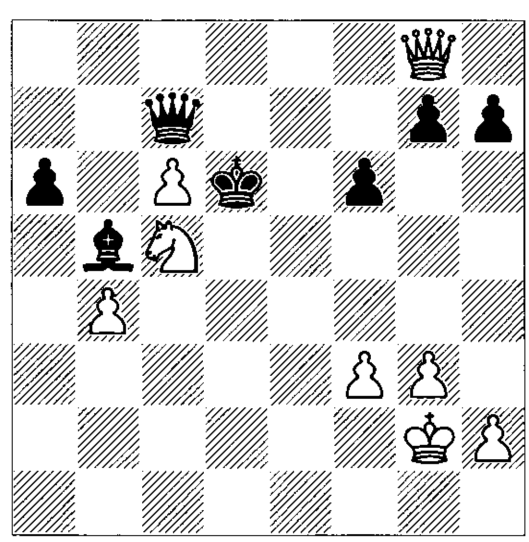
32 ♕xd5 ♔f8!

Preparing ...f6 without allowing ♕g8+. Black now wins back the c6-pawn.

33 f3! f6 34 ♘d7+ ♔e7 35 ♕g8 ♔d6! 36 ♘c5 *(D)*

After 36 ♕xg7? ♗xc6 Black wins a piece because of the pin.

B

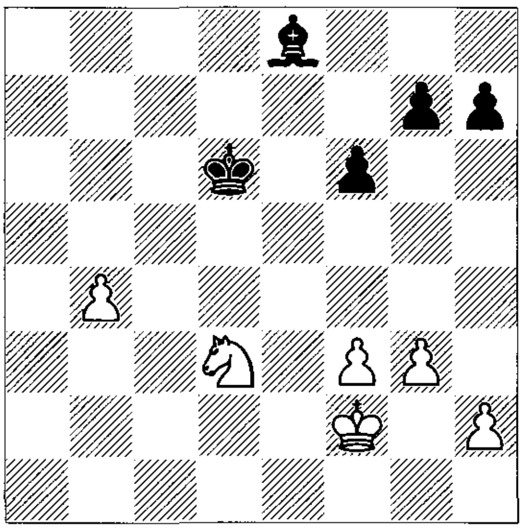


36...♕e7 37 ♕c8! ♗xc6

Black achieves nothing with 37...♕e2+ 38 ♔h3 ♕f1+ 39 ♔g4 (Kramnik).

38 ♕xa6 ♕e3 39 ♕d3+ ♕xd3 40 ♘xd3 ♗e8 41 ♔f2 *(D)*

B

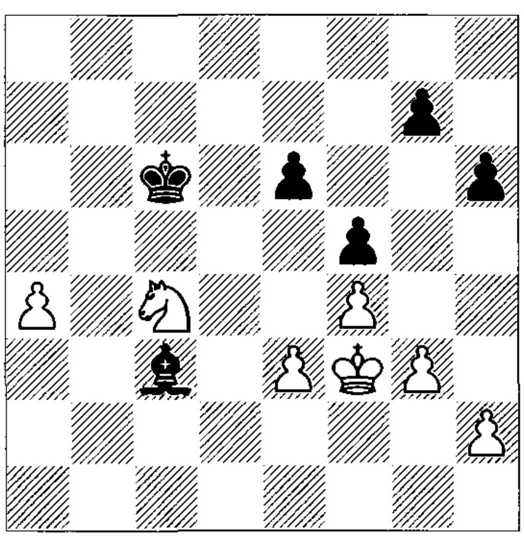


The smoke has cleared and the time-control has been reached. White's pawn-majority has been transformed into an extra pawn but Black still has drawing chances with his active king and the limited material.

41...♔d5 42 ♘f4+!

White gives up the b4-pawn to go after Black's kingside. Curiously, Kramnik and Gelfand had a similar ending a few years earlier, in which Kramnik also managed to win with basically the same plan:

W



Kramnik – Gelfand
Astana 2001

49 e4! ♔c5 50 ♘e5 fxe4+ 51 ♔xe4 ♔b4 52 ♘c6+ ♔xa4 53 ♘d4 ♔b4 54 ♘xe6 ♔c4 55 g4 ♗f6 56 h3! ♗b2 57 h4 ♗c3 58 f5 ♗b2 59 ♘xg7! ♗xg7 60 g5 1-0.

We now return to the main game:

42...♔c4 43 ♘e6 ♔xb4

After 43...g6 White cuts off Black's king by 44 ♔e3 ♔xb4 45 ♔d4, with good winning chances (Kramnik).

44 ♘xg7 ♗f7 45 ♘f5 ♔c5 46 ♘h6! ♗b3 47 ♘g4

Forcing a new and decisive weakness. The black king is too far away.

47...f5 48 ♘f6 h6 49 ♔e3 ♔d6 50 ♔f4 ♔e6

White wins after 50...♗e6 51 ♘h5 and 52 ♘g7.

51 ♘g8 ♗c2

51...h5 loses to 52 ♔g5.

52 ♘xh6 ♔f6 53 g4 fxg4 54 fxg4 ♔g6 55 ♘f5 ♗d3 56 h4 ♗e2 57 h5+ ♔h7 58 ♔g5 ♗d3 59 ♔h4 ♔g8 60 ♘d6 ♔g7 61 g5 ♗c2 62 ♘c4 1-0

A key strategic aspect of chess relates to *changes in the pawn-structure.* Often this is where advantages change hands and where the game goes in a new direction. Throughout a game the pawn-structure usually changes several times, and with each new pawn-structure new strategic possibilities arise. Let us see a game from a modern-day super-GM tournament to illustrate this point. While this may not strike the reader as the most enterprising game played by these two dynamic top players, the game shows well how Steinitz's theories form the underlying framework of modern chess. Notice how the strategic battle changes with each alteration of the pawn-structure.

Shirov – Carlsen
Morelia/Linares 2008

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 a6 5 ♗d3 ♘e7!?

This subvariation in the Paulsen is a favourite of the Swiss grandmaster Milov.

6 0-0 ♘bc6 7 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 8 ♗e3

8 ♕g4 is considered the most critical approach to Black's set-up.

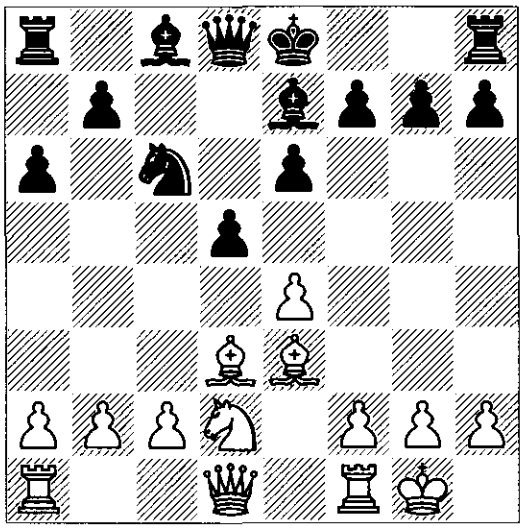
8...♗e7 9 ♘d2 d5!? *(D)*

The first change in the pawn-structure. Black accepts an isolated pawn in return for active piece-play.

10 exd5 exd5 11 ♘b3 0-0 12 ♖e1 ♖e8 13 c3

Now the position resembles the Tarrasch Variation of the French Defence – 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 ♘gf3 ♘c6 6 ♗b5

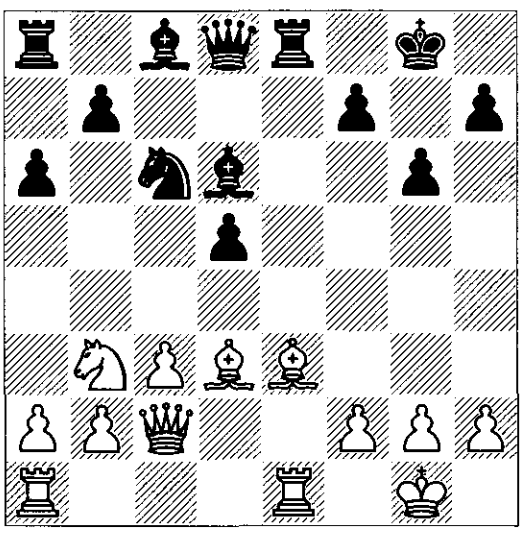
W



♗d6 7 dxc5 ♗xc5 8 0-0 ♘e7 9 ♘b3 ♗d6. As we know from Nimzowitsch's description of isolated-pawn positions – see Chapter 3 – White should restrain and blockade on d4.

13...♗d6 14 ♕c2 g6 *(D)*

W



15 ♗c5!

A strategic feature of the isolated-pawn position is that White would like to exchange the dark-squared bishops, leaving Black with a bad light-squared bishop.

15...♗c7!

Black sensibly avoids the exchange.

16 ♖xe8+?!

The direct 16 ♕d2 seems more natural to me, with an edge for White.

16...♕xe8 17 ♕d2 ♕e5!

With an isolated pawn, Black must initiate active piece-play, and here Carlsen tries to poke holes in the white king's position...

18 ♕h6!

...which White resists. 18 g3 would give Black light-squared play.

18...♗f5!

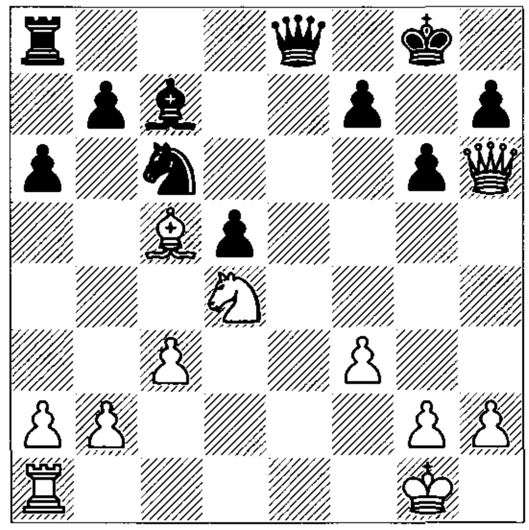
As explained above, White would like to exchange the dark-squared bishops and Black the light-squared ones. Notice how it is the pawn-structure that determines which strategic exchanges to aim for.

19 ♗xf5 ♕xf5 20 ♘d4

Blockade!

20...♕e4 21 f3 ♕e8 *(D)*

W



22 ♘xc6!?

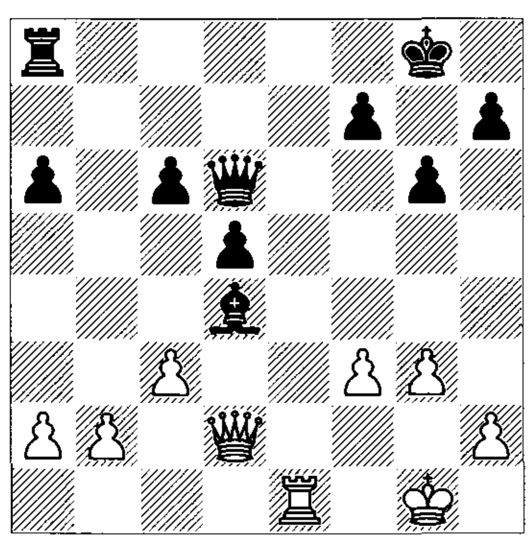
Realizing that he has no real chances of putting pressure on the isolated d-pawn, Shirov changes the pawn-structure into a *hanging* one. That in turn changes the strategic characteristics of the position. Black's d-pawn is no longer vulnerable, but in an eventual rook ending his a-pawn might be following a white rook-lift: ♖d1-d4-a4 or even worse ♖d1-d4-b4-b6. Thus Black should aim to stay clear of a rook ending. Again the pawn-structure lays out the foundation for the strategic battle.

22...bxc6 23 ♗d4 ♗e5 24 ♕d2 ♕b8! 25 g3

I would prefer 25 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 26 ♖e1, but as long as there are queens on the board, Black is fine. He may then initiate counterplay by ...c5, activating the 'lustful' passed pawn on d5, as Nimzowitsch would put it.

25...♕d6 26 ♖e1 ♗xd4+ *(D)*

W



27 cxd4!?

As 27 ♕xd4 does not bring White much, Shirov initiates a new change of the pawn-structure. Now White threatens 28 ♖c1, clamping down the backward c-pawn with some advantage. So Black's next move is strategically forced.

27...c5! 28 ♔g2?!

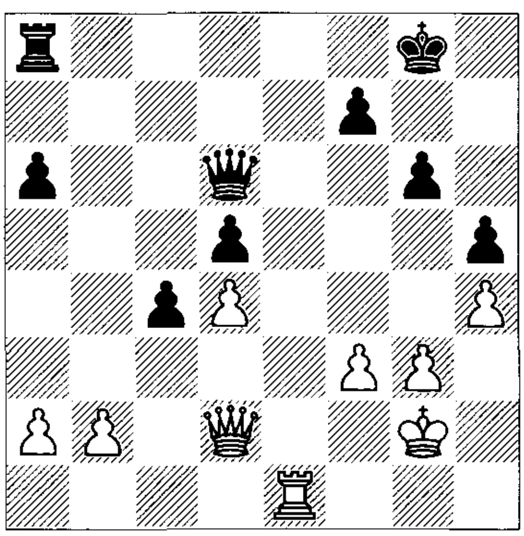
The natural follow-up to the previous move would be 28 dxc5, although after 28...♕xc5+ the d-pawn is as much a strong passed pawn as a weak isolated one.

28...c4!

This pins down White's b2-pawn. Now White has to be careful not to end up worse. Shirov makes sure that doesn't happen through a new altering of the pawn-structure, after which the game peters out in a draw.

29 h4 h5 *(D)*

W



30 g4!

This may look risky but in fact it is a necessary precaution against Black's plan of piling up against the b2-pawn, which would leave White passive, while 30 b3 ♖c8 31 bxc4 dxc4 (or 31...♖xc4) leaves Black somewhat better as his pawn is further advanced and his king safer.

30...hxg4 31 fxg4 ♕d7 32 ♔g3!

With so few pieces left, Steinitz is indeed right: the king is a strong piece that can take care of himself!

32...♖e8!

This sensible liquidation more or less guarantees the draw. Now one side or the other will be able to force a perpetual check in the queen ending.

33 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 34 h5 ♕e4 35 hxg6 fxg6 36 ♕f4 ♕e1+ 37 ♔h3 ♕h1+ 38 ♔g3 ♕e1+ 39 ♔h3 ½-½

Control of Key Squares and Files

In the following chapter we shall delve deeper into the importance of controlling (and *overprotecting*) vital squares and files. This is one of the key elements of the Hypermodern School, in which Nimzowitsch & Co. expand on Steinitz & Co.'s earlier description. However, let us here briefly look at two of my older games, in which possession of vital squares for the knight made all the difference.

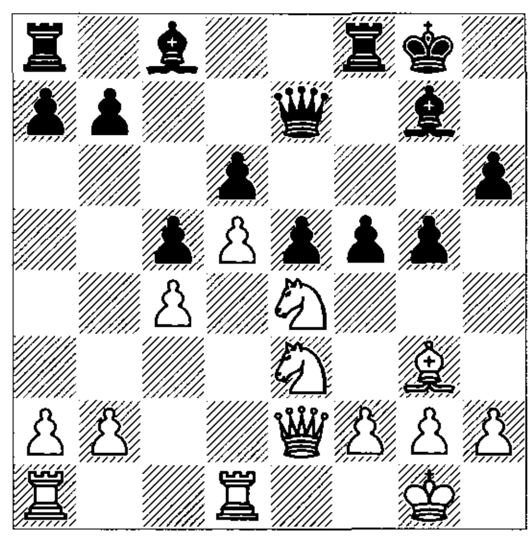
L.B. Hansen – McNab

Novi Sad Olympiad 1990

1 d4 d6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 c4 ♘d7 4 ♘c3 e5 5 e4 ♗g7 6 ♗e2 ♘gf6 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♗e3

Two years earlier, at the Olympiad in Thessaloniki 1988, I had witnessed my compatriot Curt Hansen win a good positional game against the same opponent: 8 ♕c2 c6 9 ♖d1 ♕e7 10 d5 c5 11 ♗g5 h6 12 ♗h4 g5 13 ♗g3 ♘h5 14 ♘d2 ♘df6 15 ♘f1! ♘f4 16 ♘e3 ♘xe2+ 17 ♕xe2 ♘xe4!? 18 ♘xe4 f5 *(D)*.

W



19 b4! cxb4 20 c5! fxe4 21 cxd6 ♕xd6 22 ♘c4 ♕a6 23 ♖ac1 ♗f5 24 ♕b2 ♖ac8 25 ♕xb4 ♕xa2 26 ♘e3! ♖xc1 27 ♖xc1 ♗g6 28 ♕xb7 ♖f7 29 ♕c8+ ♔h7 30 d6 (the passed pawn now decides the game) 30...♕a4 31 h3 ♖f8 32 d7 ♕a5 33 ♖c7 ♕d2 34 ♕xf8! 1-0. However, I assumed that McNab was well prepared for that.

8...♖e8?!

The main line here is 8...♘g4. Another alternative is 8...a5!?, which McNab played a few rounds earlier against Gelfand in the same event. After 9 ♕c2 ♘g4 10 ♗g5 f6 11 ♗d2 exd4!? 12 ♘xd4 ♘c5 13 ♘b3 ♘xb3 14 ♕xb3 f5!? 15 ♗xg4 fxg4 16 ♗e3 ♗e6 17 ♖ad1 ♖f7!

18 ♘d5 b6 19 ♕c2 ♕f8! 20 b3 ♗h6! Black achieved a draw (in fact, Gelfand almost over-pressed). The text-move is weaker – the rook is rarely well placed on e8 in the King's Indian when White still has the option of blocking the centre.

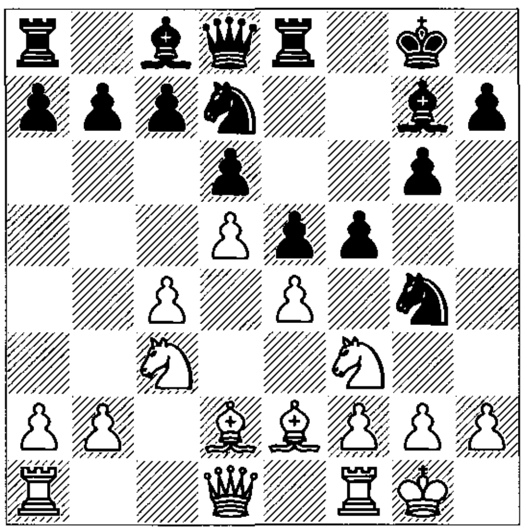
9 d5!

With the rook on e8, White does not mind closing the centre. The rook belongs on f8 to support ...f5.

9...♘g4 10 ♗g5 f6 11 ♗d2 f5?! *(D)*

The modest 11...♘h6, followed by 12...♘f7, is better.

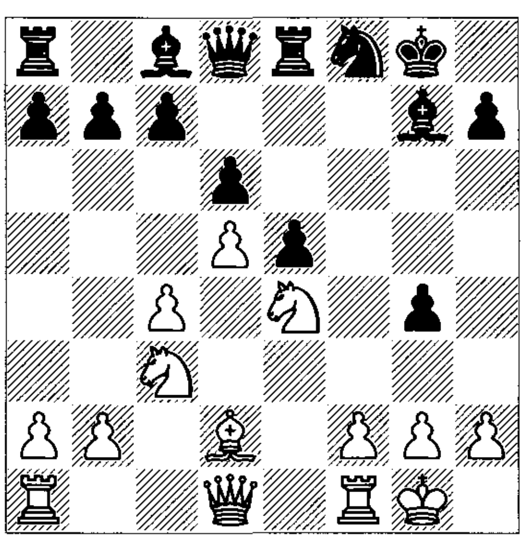
W



12 ♘g5! ♘f8 13 exf5! gxf5 14 ♗xg4 fxg4 15 ♘ge4 *(D)*

With White's possession of the vital blockading square on e4 Black is already in trouble. Although the direct 15 f3! may have been even stronger, I could not resist centralizing the knight to this wonderful square. Black is left with no counterplay.

B



15...♗f5 16 f3! ♕d7

16...gxf3 17 ♕xf3 ♗g6 18 ♗g5 ♕c8 19 ♕g3 is not much better.

17 ♗h6! ♔h8

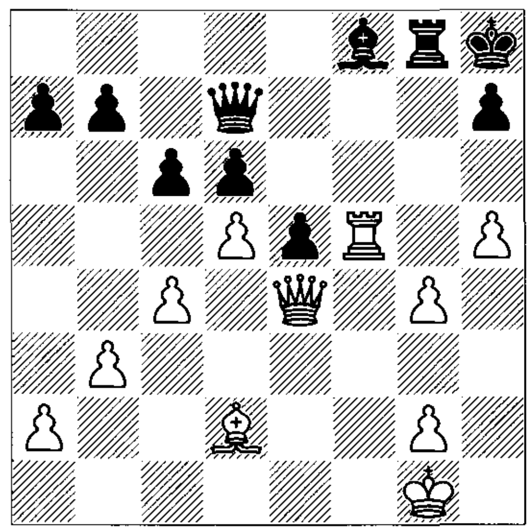
Not 17...♗xh6? 18 ♘f6+.

18 ♕d2 ♖e7 19 ♗g5 ♖f7 20 fxg4 ♗xe4

This is tantamount to resignation as Black loses a pawn without improving his position. However, 20...♗xg4 21 ♘f6 ♕c8 22 ♘xg4 ♖xf1+ 23 ♖xf1 ♕xg4 24 ♖f7 was rather hopeless too.

21 ♖xf7 ♕xf7 22 ♘xe4 ♕g6 23 ♕e2 ♘d7 24 ♖f1 ♘c5 25 ♖f5! ♘xe4 26 ♕xe4 ♖g8 27 h4! ♕e8 28 b3 ♕d7 29 ♗d2 c6 30 h5 ♗f8 *(D)*

W



Total domination of all important squares and files. Now White initiates the final assault – penetration at f7.

31 ♕f3 ♕e8 32 ♖f7 ♗e7 33 ♗h6 ♖xg4 34 ♖xe7! 1-0

L.B. Hansen – Wahls

Tåstrup 1992

1 c4 g6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 ♗e3

The Gligorić Variation, my main weapon versus the King's Indian at the time.

7...c6 8 ♕d2!?

This move enjoyed a brief period of fashion following a win by Kasparov against Ivanchuk in Reggio Emilia 1991/2.

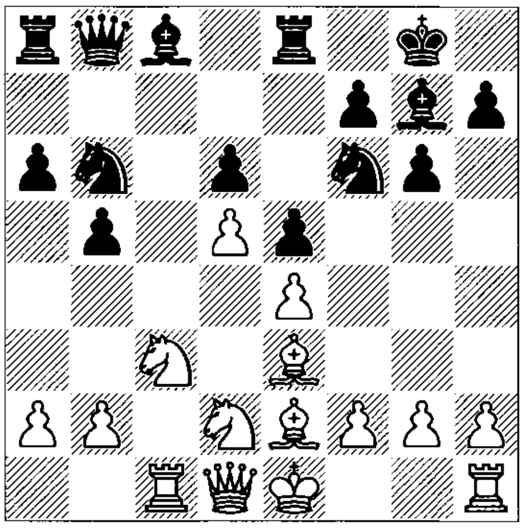
8...♘bd7 9 ♖d1 ♖e8 10 d5 cxd5 11 cxd5 a6 12 ♕c2

Kasparov-Ivanchuk went 12 0-0 b5 13 ♕c2 ♘b6 14 a4! bxa4 15 ♘xa4 ♘xa4 16 ♕xa4 with some advantage for White.

12...♕c7 13 ♘d2 b5 14 ♖c1 ♘b6 15 ♕d1! ♕b8 *(D)*

16 a4!

White immediately targets Black's vulnerable queenside. As Réti used to say: "Do not castle until there is nothing better to do!" White

W


fights for squares on the queenside, in particular c4.

16...bxa4

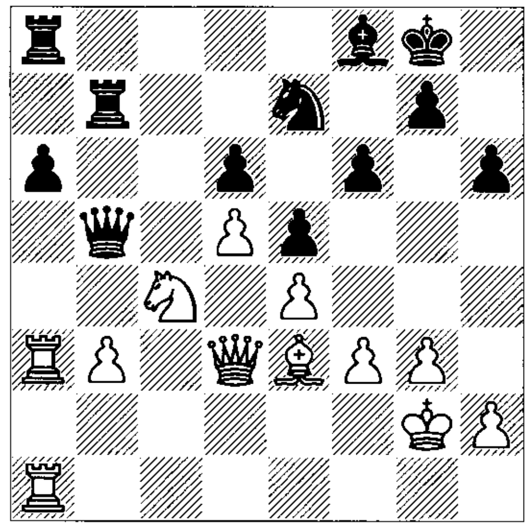
16...b4 17 ♘cb1 is also better for White.

17 ♘xa4 ♘xa4 18 ♕xa4 ♗d7

18...♕xb2? loses material after 19 ♘c4 ♕b8 20 ♘b6.

19 ♕a3 ♗b5 20 f3

One of the first old masters that I studied in my early teenage years was Akiba Rubinstein. My chess club had a collection of old books that the members could borrow, and I studied Kmoch's *Rubinstein's 100 Masterpieces* with great delight. Rubinstein had a very profound feeling for the pawn-structure, and I learned a lot from studying his games. One of the games that I liked was Rubinstein-Duras, Karlsbad 1911: 1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♘f6 3 g3 ♗b4 4 ♗g2 0-0 5 ♘f3 ♖e8 6 0-0 ♘c6 7 ♘d5 ♗f8 8 d3 h6 9 b3 d6 10 ♗b2 ♘xd5 11 cxd5 ♘e7 12 e4 c5 13 dxc6 ♘xc6 14 d4 ♗g4 15 d5 ♘e7 16 ♕d3 ♕d7 17 ♘d2 ♗h3?! (with the passive bishop on f8, this exchange merely helps White) 18 a4 ♗xg2 19 ♔xg2 ♖eb8?! 20 ♘c4 b5? (and this is a conceptual mistake: Black will have a much harder time defending a7 and d6 than White with b3; compare this to my game with Sosonko above) 21 axb5 ♕xb5 22 ♖a3 ♘g6 23 ♖fa1 a6 24 ♗c1! (activating the bishop) 24...♖b7 25 ♗e3 f6 26 f3 ♘e7 *(D)*.

W


27 ♕f1! ♘c8 28 ♘d2 ♕b4 29 ♕c4! ♕xc4 30 ♘xc4 ♖ab8 31 ♘d2 (Black has been thoroughly outplayed; now a6 falls) 31...♖c7 32 ♖xa6 ♖c2 33 ♖6a2 ♖xa2 34 ♖xa2 ♗e7 35 ♔f2 ♔f7 36 ♔e2 ♔e8 37 ♔d3 ♔d7 38 ♔c3 ♗d8 39 ♘c4 ♗c7 40 g4! ♗d8 41 ♖a6 ♗c7 42 h4 ♗d8 43 h5 ♗c7 44 b4 ♖b7 45 ♖a8 ♔d8 46 ♔b3 ♖b8 47 ♖xb8 ♗xb8 48 b5 ♘e7 49 b6 f5?! (hopeless, but otherwise White goes ♔b4-b5 and ♘a5-c6, winning easily) 50 gxf5 ♘g8 51 ♗f2! ♔c8 (51...♘f6 52 ♗h4) 52 ♗h4 1-0.

20...♘h5

After 20...♗xe2 21 ♔xe2 the king feels completely safe in the centre. Black has no pieces ready to attack it.

21 ♗c4! f5 22 0-0 ♘f6 23 ♗xb5 axb5 24 ♕d3

White has a clear positional advantage similar to the one in Rubinstein-Duras.

24...f4 25 ♗f2 g5

Without support from the pieces, this kingside advance is not really threatening.

26 ♔h1

Prophylaxis. It was also possible to go directly after the b5-pawn with 26 ♖c6 followed by 27 ♖b6.

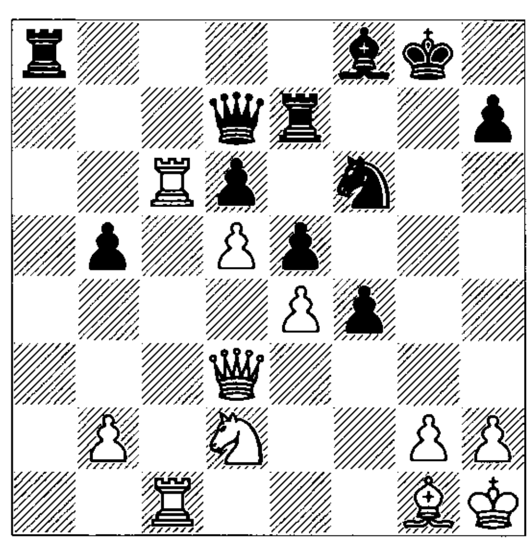
26...g4 27 fxg4

Here too 27 ♖c6 was possible. The classic pawn sacrifice 27...g3!? 28 hxg3 fxg3 29 ♗xg3 is unlikely to succeed here with the lack of piece support.

27...♘xg4 28 ♗g1 ♖e7 29 ♕h3! ♘f6 30 ♖c6!

Finally White takes possession of this wonderful square.

30...♕d8 31 ♖fc1 ♕d7 32 ♕d3 ♗f8 *(D)*

W


So far I am pleased by my play, and here I could calmly take on b5 with a clear advantage. In mutual time-pressure I now lose control and the advantage shifts to Black – and then back again!

33 ♘f3? ♕g4! 34 ♖6c2 ♖g7 35 ♖e2 ♖a4!

Compare this position to the one a few moves ago – Black's game has certainly improved!

36 h3?!

This unnecessarily weakens g3.

36...♕g6 37 ♘h4?! ♕h5?

After 37...♕g3! Black would be better, as White has major problems defending his e4-pawn. Now White is for choice again!

38 ♗f2!

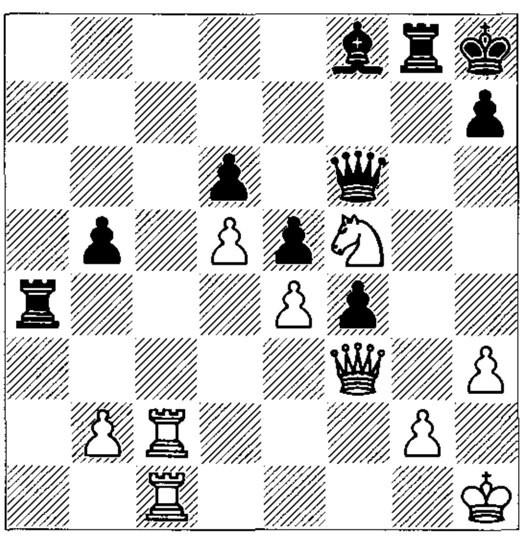
Not 38 ♘f5? ♘xe4!.

38...♔h8 39 ♕f3! ♕g5 40 ♘f5 ♖g8

The time-scramble is over and White is even able to exchange his bishop for Black's knight, making the position a classic good knight vs bad bishop scenario.

41 ♗h4 ♕g6 42 ♗xf6+ ♕xf6 43 ♖ec2 *(D)*

B



White is winning. The knight is a monster, b5 is weak and White is about to penetrate via the c-file.

43...♖g5 44 ♖c8 ♖xf5

This exchange sacrifice is insufficient due to the weakness of the black king.

45 exf5 ♕xf5 46 ♖1c7! ♔g8

46...e4 47 ♕c3+ mates.

47 ♖e8 ♖c4 48 ♖xc4 bxc4 49 ♕g4+ 1-0

The simplest: White picks up the c4-pawn and wins easily.

Control of the Centre

The centre is of vital importance in chess. This has been known since the Romantic Era. In those times, the centre was regarded as important in relation to piece mobility, whereas the Scientific School – Steinitz and especially Tarrasch – urged the players to occupy the centre with pawns, so as to gain space. This was one of the key points in Tarrasch's writings, and he enthusiastically condemned – even mocked – opening play that did not focus on occupying the centre with pawns. Later this was to be challenged by the Hypermodern School (see the next chapter), which acknowledged the importance of the centre but claimed that it could also be controlled with pieces from afar, not just by occupying it with pawns. Today the view is more nuanced – modern grandmasters believe it depends on specific features whether the Scientific School or the Hypermodern School is right. Or in other words: sometimes a voluminous pawn-centre *is* really strong, while in other situations it just constitutes a target. Much depends on how *dynamic* the pawn-centre is and whether the side with less space can find good squares for his pieces outside the centre, from which they can exert pressure on the central pawns and squares.

L.B. Hansen – Rabiega

2nd Bundesliga 1998/9

1 d4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 c4 e6 4 g3

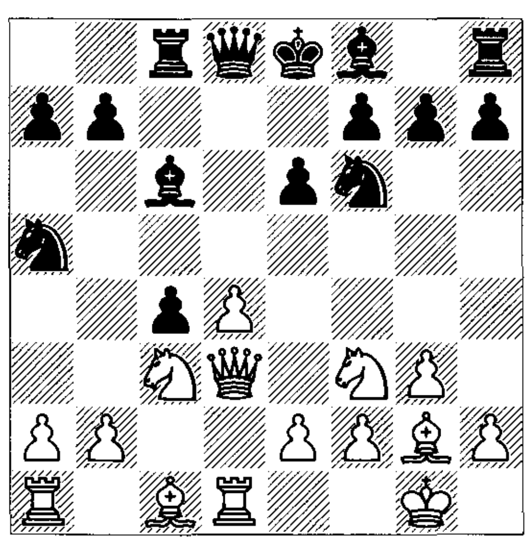
The Catalan has been my faithful companion since the 1980s.

4...dxc4 5 ♗g2 ♘c6 6 ♕a4 ♗d7

6...♗b4+ 7 ♗d2 ♘d5 is more common.

7 ♕xc4 ♘a5 8 ♕d3 c5 9 0-0 ♗c6 10 ♘c3 ♖c8 11 ♖d1 c4?! *(D)*

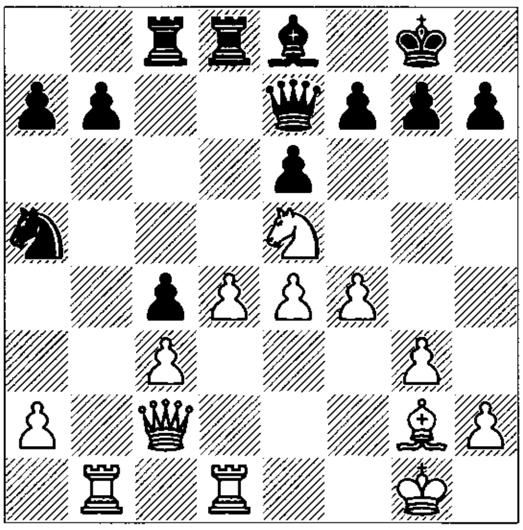
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A compromising move. Now White is allowed to build a strong pawn-centre.

12 ♕c2 ♗b4 13 ♗g5! 0-0 14 e4 ♗xc3 15 ♗xf6! ♕xf6 16 bxc3 ♖fd8 17 ♘e5 ♗e8 18 ♖ab1 ♕e7 19 f4 *(D)*

B



White is clearly better. This is one of the cases where Black has no compensation in return for the pawn-centre – the centre is dynamic and the black pieces are not well placed to challenge it. Just look at the pieces on a5 and e8!

19...b5 20 ♘f3!

Making room for the e-pawn to advance.

20...♘b7 21 e5! h6

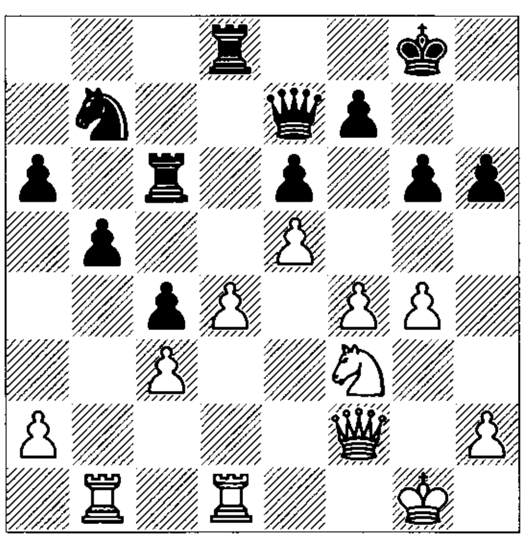
21...♗c6 was desirable but unfortunately loses a pawn to 22 ♘g5 f5 (or 22...g6 – but not 22...♗xg2? 23 ♕xh7+) 23 ♗xc6 ♖xc6 24 ♖xb5.

22 ♘h4!

Threatening 23 f5.

22...g6 23 ♕f2 a6 24 g4! ♗c6 25 ♗xc6 ♖xc6 26 ♘f3 *(D)*

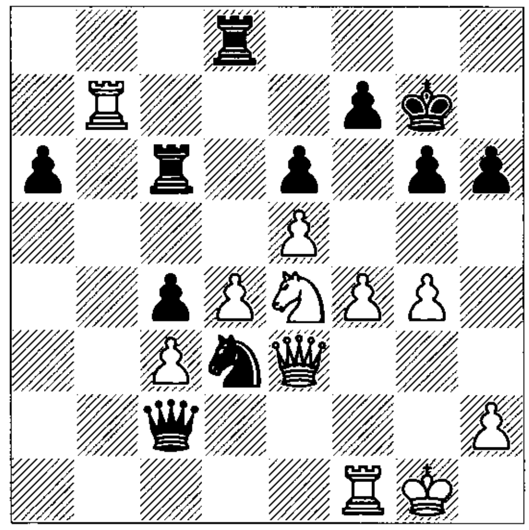
B



White plans to regroup the knight via d2 to e4 and f6 before crashing through with f5 or d5. Black's problem is his passive pieces, which exercise no pressure on the white centre. The knight on b7 in particular is a sorry sight. Rabiega sacrifices a pawn to activate this knight, but it is insufficient.

26...b4?! 27 ♖xb4 ♘c5! 28 ♕d2 ♘d3 29 ♖bb1 ♕d7 30 ♕e3 ♕d5 31 ♘d2! ♕a5 32 ♘e4 ♕xa2 33 ♖f1 ♔g7 34 ♖b7! ♕c2 *(D)*

W



35 f5!

The decisive breakthrough.

35...exf5 36 gxf5 gxf5 37 ♘f6!

Blocking the black rook. 37...♕xc3 now loses to 38 ♕g3+ ♔h8 (38...♔f8 39 ♕g8#) 39 ♖xf7 ♕xd4+ 40 ♔h1.

37...f4 38 ♕e4

Now the invasion comes at h7 instead.

38...♖xf6 39 exf6+ ♔h8 40 ♖xf7 ♖g8+ 41 ♖g7 ♖xg7+ 42 fxg7+ 1-0

42...♔xg7 (or 42...♔g8 43 ♕e7) 43 ♕g2+ ♕xg2+ 44 ♔xg2 is easy.

Space and Superior Mobility

Space plays an important role in positional chess. The reasoning is straightforward: the side that controls more space generally has superior mobility, simply because he has more squares available on which to regroup his pieces. A space advantage is a product of the pawn-structure. As the old saying goes, 'space is gained by pawns but exploited by pieces'. Advancing pawns grabs space; pieces exploit this space by means of their increased mobility.

The former World Champion Anatoly Karpov is one of the best in chess history at exploiting space. Wins such as those against Unzicker (Nice Olympiad 1974), Andersson (World Junior Ch, Stockholm 1969) or Yusupov (Tilburg 1993), constitute excellent study material for the interested reader. In each case Black is smothered to death. Here we shall look at a lesser-known game.

Karpov – Ilinčić
Belgrade 1996

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 d4 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘a6

This line rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s and is now accepted as a reasonable alternative to the older 7...♘c6 and 7...♘bd7.

8 ♖e1 c6 9 ♗f1 ♗g4

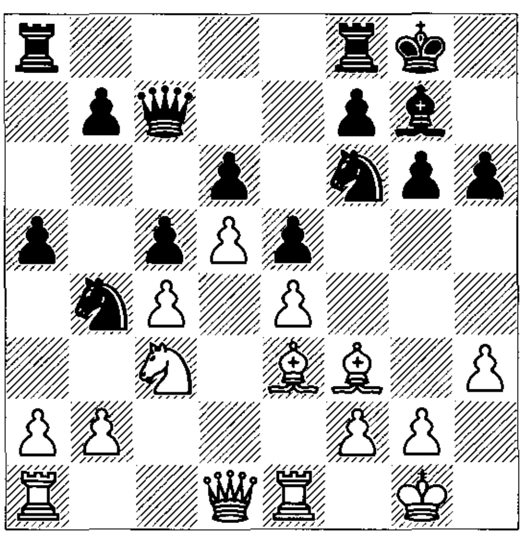
This more or less forces White to close the centre due to the indirect pressure on d4.

10 d5 ♘b4 11 ♗e2

This is almost automatic as Black was threatening 11...♗xf3 12 ♕xf3 ♘c2, but in fact Bent Larsen has had a very interesting idea in a similar position. Larsen-K.Berg, Danish Ch, Aalborg 1994 went 8...♕e8 9 ♗f1 ♗g4 10 d5 ♘b4 and now 11 a3!? ♗xf3 12 gxf3 ♘a6 13 b4, when in return for the compromised pawn-structure, White had gained time and sidelined Black's knight on a6.

11...a5 12 ♗g5 h6 13 ♗e3 ♕c7 14 h3 ♗xf3 15 ♗xf3 c5 *(D)*

W



Perhaps this was not necessary. Black hands White a 'free' space advantage. I think Black should have maintained the option of ...cxd5 at some point.

16 ♖f1!

Such small moves on the back rank are a Karpov speciality. White now regroups in preparation for an eventual f4 advance.

16...♕e7 17 ♕d2 ♔h7 18 ♖ae1 ♘a6 19 ♗d1! ♘c7 20 g3 ♘d7 21 ♗c2 ♘b6

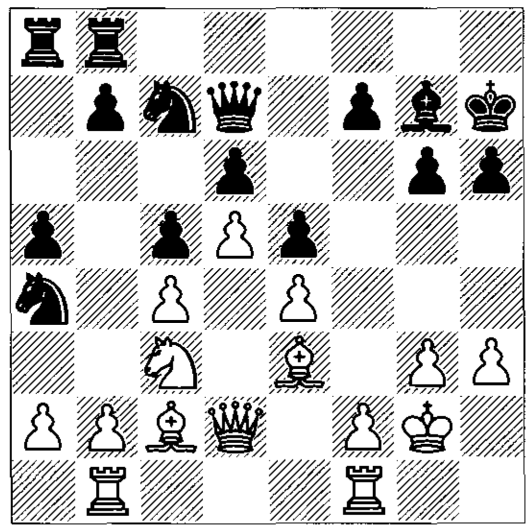
Black can only wait since any pawn move would just compromise his position. With his superior centralization and mobility, White is better positioned for an opening of the position after, e.g., 21...f5 22 f4.

22 ♗d3!

A significant move. White certainly does not want to play b3, for two reasons. First, that would give Black unnecessary counterplay based on ...a4 and second, White wants to keep the d1-a4 diagonal open for the bishop.

22...♕d7 23 ♔g2 ♘a4 24 ♖b1 ♖fb8 25 ♗c2 *(D)*

B



25...♘xc3?

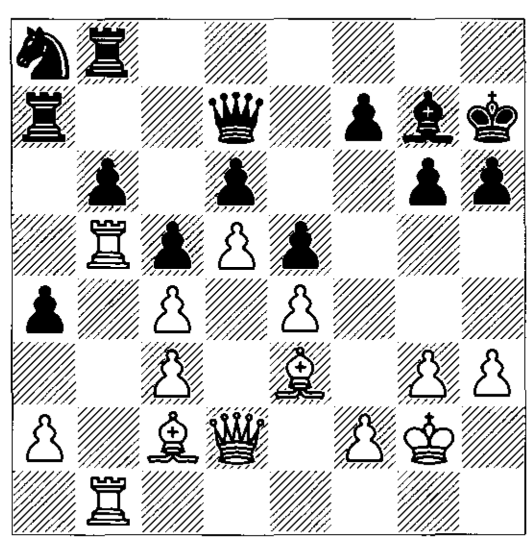
An instructive mistake. Usually it is a good idea to exchange some pieces if you lack space, but not here. The knight should instead retreat to b6.

26 bxc3!

Did Black miss this? After 26 ♕xc3 b5, he would indeed obtain some play, but now 26...b5 fails to 27 cxb5 ♘xb5 28 ♗a4!. Thus Black has simply opened the b-file for White for free – the doubled pawns are of no consequence here as Black cannot attack them.

26...a4 27 ♖b6! ♖a7 28 ♖fb1 ♘a8 29 ♖6b5 b6 *(D)*

W



30 f4!

Having tied Black up on the queenside, White now turns his attention to the kingside. Given

his lack of space and poor coordination, Black will be hard-pressed to meet this advance as he cannot manoeuvre back and forth as freely as White.

30...f6 31 f5! g5 32 h4! ♖h8

Black cannot keep the kingside closed by 32...g4 as after 33 h5! the g4-pawn is soon doomed.

33 ♖h1 ♔g8 34 ♖bb1!

Regrouping to the kingside. Notice that Black cannot follow suit – someone needs to look after the b6- and a4-pawns.

34...♖a6 35 ♖bf1?!

This move is fine in itself, but White had a chance to strike immediately by 35 hxg5 hxg5 36 ♗xg5, when Black cannot recapture since White's attack is then devastating: 36...fxg5? 37 ♕xg5 ♖xh1 (37...♕f7 38 ♖xh8+ ♔xh8 39 ♖h1+ transposes) 38 ♖xh1 ♕f7 39 ♖h6! followed by f6, when the black position collapses.

35...♕d8 36 ♕d1!

Eyeing both a4 and h5.

36...a3?!

Passive as it is, I think Black should have tried 36...♕d7. The text-move allows White to activate the light-squared bishop.

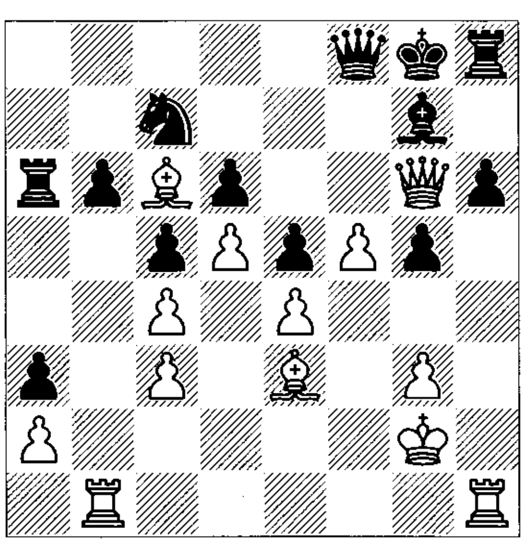
37 ♗a4! ♘c7 38 ♗c6 ♔f7 39 ♕h5+ ♔g8 40 ♖b1!

Back and forth! White now threatens 41 ♗b7, winning the b6-pawn. Black must play another passive queen move.

40...♕b8 41 ♕g6 ♕f8 42 hxg5 fxg5 *(D)*

42...hxg5 43 ♖xh8+ ♔xh8 44 ♖h1+ ♔g8 45 ♗xg5! just transposes.

W



43 ♗xg5!

Crunch time!

43...hxg5 44 ♖xh8+ ♔xh8 45 ♖h1+ ♔g8 46 ♕h7+ ♔f7 47 f6!

The point – 47...♔xf6 loses to 48 ♖f1+.

47...♕h8 48 ♕f5! 1-0

In this game White's space advantage gave him a *general* space advantage and in consequence superior mobility. However, a space strategy may also be aimed at reducing the scope of a *specific* enemy piece. Such a strategy helped Vishy Anand win the World Championship.

Aronian – Anand

World Ch, Mexico City 2007

Round two of the World Championship in Mexico – an important game. Certainly Aronian was one of the outsiders for the tournament, but after this game he never got going, whereas Anand never looked back.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 c6 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗h4!?

This Anti-Moscow Variation is all the rage these days. I shall have more to say about it in Chapter 6 on Creative Concreteness.

6...dxc4 7 e4 g5 8 ♗g3 b5 9 ♘e5 h5 10 h4

The rare 10 f3!? was tried in Carlsen-Anand, Morelia/Linares 2008, but after 10...h4 11 ♗f2 ♗b7 12 ♗e2 (in Manninen-L.B.Hansen, Östersund Zonal 1992, I got a good position after 12 ♗e3 ♘fd7 13 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 14 ♕d2 ♗e7 15 ♗e2 ♖g8 16 g3 ♕c7 17 ♗f2 a6 18 ♖g1 0-0-0; it now seems funny that in those days the Anti-Moscow was considered a somewhat risky and speculative choice by White!) 12...♘bd7 13 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 14 0-0 e5! 15 a4 a6 16 d5 ♖h6! 17 dxc6 ♗xc6 18 axb5 axb5 19 ♖xa8 ♕xa8 20 ♕c1 ♖g6 21 ♖d1 ♗c5 the World Champion was better and duly won.

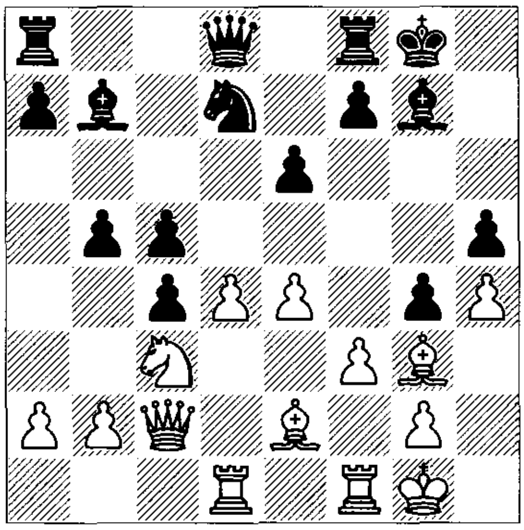
10...g4 11 ♗e2 ♗b7 12 0-0 ♘bd7 13 ♕c2 ♘xe5 14 ♗xe5 ♗g7 15 ♖ad1

A dangerous alternative is 15 ♗g3!? – see page 150.

15...0-0 16 ♗g3 ♘d7 17 f3 c5! *(D)*

A great move found by Anand's second, my compatriot Peter Heine Nielsen. Apart from being a very strong player (2650), Peter is a great theoretician. Whenever one of the players in the Danish national team has an opening problem during a team event, we can turn to Peter: "Hey Peter, what is the current status of variation x in opening y?" – and he will always know the answer!

W



18 dxc5

Here White has alternatives but they are unpleasant: 18 ♘xb5 cxd4 19 ♘xd4 ♕b6 20 ♗f2 g3 21 ♗e3 ♕d8 (Nielsen) or 18 d5 ♗d4+! 19 ♔h1 ♗e5. We shall encounter this last motif again later in the game.

18...♕e7!

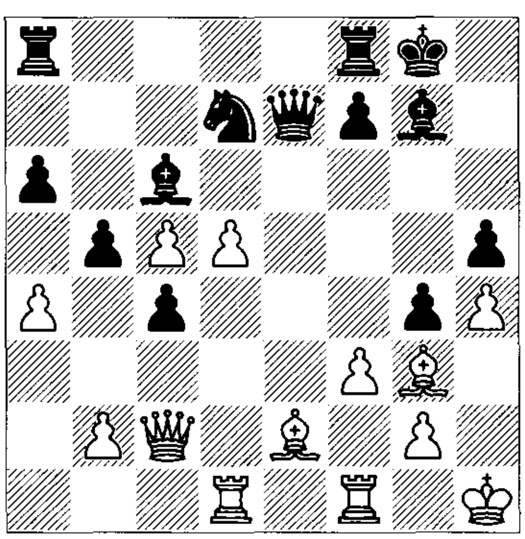
Exploiting the fact that 19 ♗d6 fails to 19...♕xh4! 20 g3 ♕h3 21 ♖f2 ♘e5!. In *New In Chess*, Nielsen mentions 19 ♖f2!? or 19 fxg4!? as White's most critical tries here. Instead Aronian initiates a pseudo-combination that doesn't work due to a nice strategic finesse.

19 ♔h1?! a6 20 a4 ♗c6! 21 ♘d5?

Aronian probably missed Vishy's 22nd move. The best chance was 21 fxg4 (Nielsen).

21...exd5 22 exd5 *(D)*

B



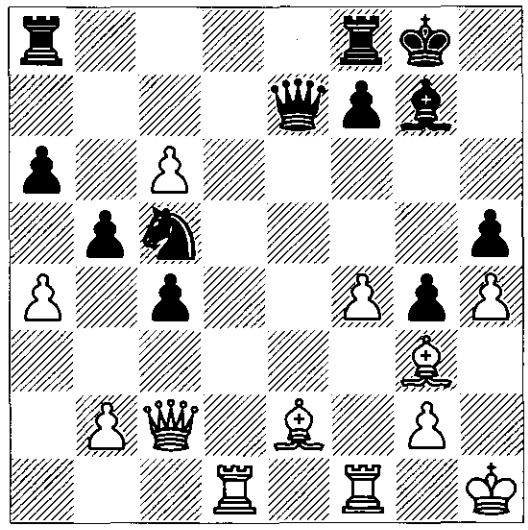
22...♗e5!

A key move. With one stroke Black manages to constrain *both* White's bishops!

23 f4 ♗g7 24 dxc6 ♘xc5 *(D)*

An instructive position. Look at White's two bishops – neither of them is doing much! The dark-squared one is restricted by its *own* pawns, while the light-squared one is constrained by the *opponent's* pawns. The pawn-chains a6-b5-c4

W



and h5-g4 seriously limit the bishop on e2. This is one of Black's key strategic objectives in this line, and Anand was very pleased after the game that his strategy of playing against the e2-bishop worked so well. Note that forcing f4 was essential – it buries the dark-squared bishop and prevents the light-squared one from breathing with fxg4.

25 ♖d5 ♘e4 26 ♗e1 ♕e6! 27 ♖xh5

This buries the rook alive, but 27 axb5!? ♕xd5 28 ♗xc4 ♕d4! does not offer White sufficient compensation according to Nielsen. Nevertheless, this may have been White's best chance to muddy the waters.

27...f5! 28 ♔h2 ♖ac8 29 ♗b4 ♖fe8 30 axb5 axb5 31 ♖e1 ♕f7 32 ♖g5 ♘xg5 33 fxg5

After 33 hxg5 Nielsen gives 33...♕h5+ 34 ♔g3 ♖e3+ 35 ♔f2 when 35...♖e4! wins, but not 35...♗d4? 36 ♗xc4+! bxc4 37 ♕xc4+ ♖e6+ 38 ♔g3! ♖cxc6 39 ♕xd4 and suddenly Black is in trouble!

33...♖xc6 34 ♗f1 ♖xe1 35 ♗xe1 ♖e6 36 ♗c3 ♕c7+ 37 g3 ♖e3 38 ♕g2 ♗xc3 39 bxc3 f4 40 ♕a8+ ♔g7 41 ♕a6 fxg3+ 0-1

The Two Bishops

Steinitz developed a theory for how to exploit the advantage of the two bishops. The advantage of the two bishops is obviously their long range, but well-placed knights in the centre may sometimes be equally powerful. The bishops may cover more squares, but the centralized knight covers the important ones! Therefore the first step in Steinitz's theory for the two bishops is to advance the pawns in such a way that the knights are deprived of any strongholds in the centre. Then the bishops will reign supreme. Steinitz played a number of highly instructive

games featuring this theme that every serious student of chess should know; e.g., the games against Rosenthal in Vienna 1873 and Englisch in London 1883. I analysed these classic games in *Foundations of Chess Strategy*. Here we shall take a new example, illustrating how modern grandmasters put Steinitz's theory into practice.

Zviagintsev – Wang Hao
Taiyuan 2007

1 e4 e5 2 f4!?

The King's Gambit! A rare but refreshing choice by a 2658 super-GM. Zviagintsev is a very creative player; for instance, he invented a novelty in the Sicilian as early as move two – 1 e4 c5 2 ♘a3!?.

2...exf4 3 ♘f3 d5

This pragmatic counterstroke in the centre is nowadays considered one the most solid ways of meeting the King's Gambit. No funny business like in the Romantic Era!

4 exd5 ♕xd5

I have played 1...e5 many times since I included the Ruy Lopez into my black repertoire in 1993, and only once has a super-GM trotted out the King's Gambit against me. In the game Grishchuk-L.B.Hansen, Esbjerg 2000 I obtained a good position (dark-square control) after 4...♘f6 5 ♗c4 ♘xd5 6 0-0 ♗e7 7 d4 ♗e6 8 ♗b3 (8 ♗xd5 and 8 ♕e2 are alternatives) 8...0-0 9 c4 ♘e3 10 ♗xe3 fxe3 11 ♕d3 ♗g4! 12 ♘e5? (12 ♘c3 is necessary, although Black has a comfortable position as White has to spend time regaining his pawn) 12...e2 13 ♖e1 and now 13...♗h5?! 14 ♗c2 ♗g6 15 ♘xg6 hxg6 16 ♘c3 ♗f6 17 d5 ♖e8 gave me a good position, although the game later ended in a draw. While my 13th move was not bad in itself, I could have punished White's inaccurate opening play by 13...♗f6! (or 13...♗h4!? 14 g3 ♗f6), when 14 ♘xg4? is not possible because of 14...♗xd4+ 15 ♔h1 ♗xb2, so White has to accept an unpleasant position after 14 ♗c2 g6 15 ♘c3 ♗xe5 16 dxe5 ♘c6.

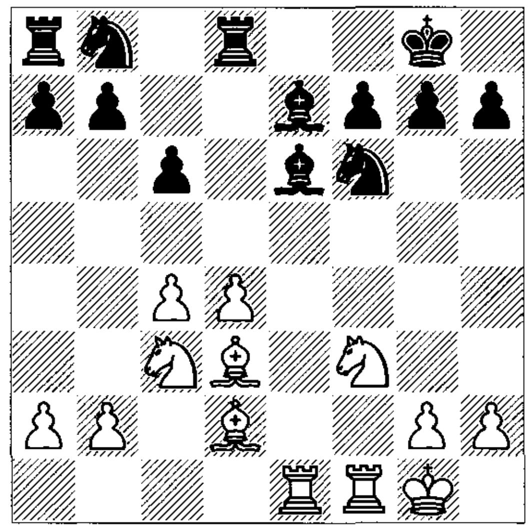
The Chinese GM – one of a number of young and highly talented players from his country – has other plans. He heads directly for an ending, but as it turns out, White will maintain some pressure.

5 d4 ♘f6 6 ♗xf4 ♕e4+

This is Black's idea: he forces an exchange of queens.

7 ♕e2 ♕xe2+ 8 ♗xe2 ♘d5 9 ♗d2 ♗e7 10 0-0 c6 11 c4 ♘f6 12 ♘c3 0-0 13 ♗d3! ♖d8 14 ♖ae1 ♗e6 *(D)*

W



15 ♘e2!

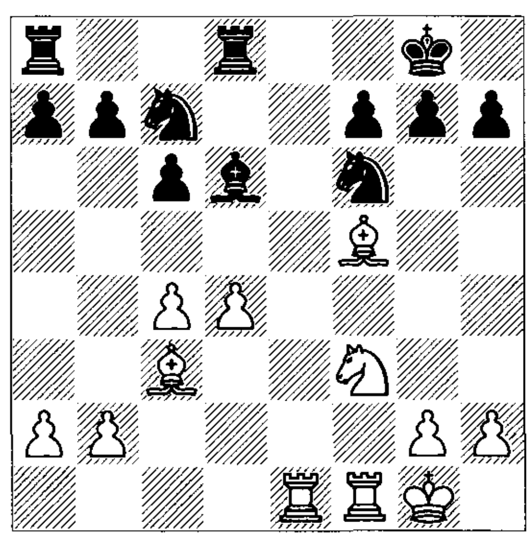
White goes after the bishop on e6, thus obtaining the advantage of the two bishops.

15...♘bd7 16 ♘f4 ♘f8 17 ♗c3 ♗d6 18 ♘xe6 ♘xe6 19 ♗f5!

White has won the two bishops and now follows Steinitz's prescription. Step one: deprive the knights of strongholds in the centre.

19...♘c7 *(D)*

W



20 ♗a5!

Step two: increase the scope of the bishops. This is done by poking holes in the enemy defences. Here Zviagintsev wants to force ...b6, after which c6 becomes a target.

20...♘fe8 21 ♘g5!

The same idea as 20 ♗a5 – White probes the black defences, creating targets.

21...g6

21...h6 22 ♗h7+ ♔h8 (22...♔f8? 23 ♖xf7#!) 23 ♘xf7+ ♔xh7 24 ♘xd8 ♖xd8 25 c5! wins

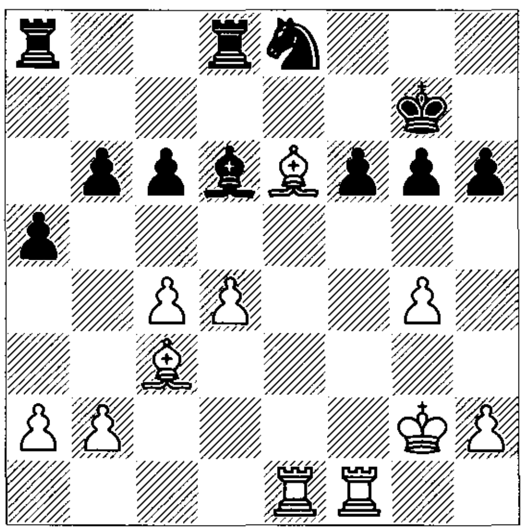
for White – the bishop is trapped! Notice the helpless black knights on the two back ranks.

22 ♗h3 b6

22...f5 is strongly met by 23 g4!, opening the position for the bishops. Nevertheless, this may have been the lesser evil. Now we see the outcome of Zviagintsev's plan since move 20: a black position full of holes.

23 ♗c3 f6 24 ♘e6 ♘xe6 25 ♗xe6+ ♔g7 26 g4! h6 27 ♔g2 a5 *(D)*

W



28 d5!

Step three: open the position for the bishops.

28...c5

28...cxd5 29 ♗xd5 and White wins at least a pawn after 29...♖ac8 30 ♖e6 or 29...♖a7 30 ♗c6.

29 h4!

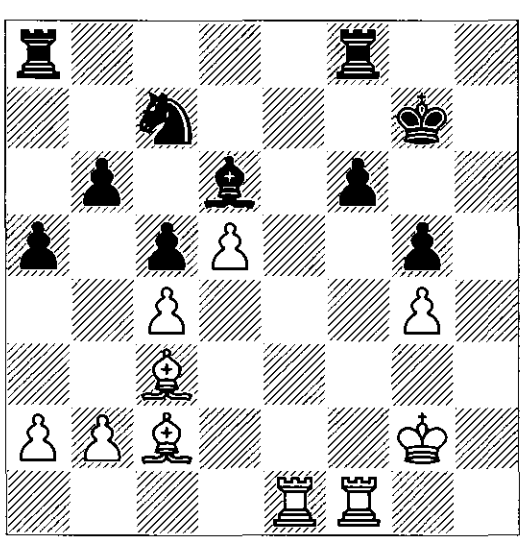
Threatening 30 g5. Black must weaken his position even further.

29...g5 30 hxg5 hxg5 31 ♗f5!

The bishop has completed its task on e6 and is transferred to a better diagonal, targeting Black's king.

31...♘c7 32 ♗c2 ♖f8 *(D)*

W



33 ♖f5!

The two bishops reign supreme. Black cannot defend g5!

33...♖ae8 34 ♖xg5+ ♔f7 35 ♗g6+ ♔g8 36 ♗xf6! 1-0

Black is mated after 36...♖xe1 37 ♗e8+! ♔h7 38 ♖h5+ ♔g8 39 ♖h8#. A great game in the spirit of Steinitz.

We have now seen a number of examples of Steinitz's theories in action in modern chess. As is apparent, most of the basic theory has stood the test of time, and Steinitz is rightly acknowledged as the founder of positional chess. Of course the theories of positional chess have been refined and improved over time. Steinitz would have liked that, I think – after all that is in line with the notion of 'The Scientific School'; science advances when new knowledge is added atop the existing knowledge. The first refinements to the theories of the Scientific School came from the Hypermodern School. However, before we turn to that, let's take a look at Lasker, Steinitz's successor as World Champion.

Steinitz versus Lasker

The Scientific Era spans some 50 years, and the dominant figures associated with the School during that period were players like Steinitz, Tarrasch, Rubinstein and Capablanca. However, the World Champion during most of the period was a man who was only indirectly associated with the Scientific School: the German Emanuel Lasker, who was World Champion from 1894 (when he won the title from Steinitz) and until 1921 (when he lost it to Capablanca). 27 years – a longer reign than any other World Champion in the history of chess. And still Lasker is a somewhat underestimated champion. In my opinion this is undeserved; he was one of the greatest. How else can one explain that he for so long managed to withstand the challenges from the key proponents of the Scientific School?

The problem was that Lasker was not well understood by his contemporaries – often they did not understand his play, and it did not always match the dogmas of the Scientific School. It is often said that Lasker was mainly a practical player and that he did not form a strategic school. However, I agree with the American GM

and prolific chess writer Andrew Soltis when he writes – in the book *Why Lasker Matters* – that "it has been said that Lasker, unlike his contemporaries, formed no school of thought. However, we are all his students."

Lasker introduced psychology into chess – he played the man, not the board. Where his contemporaries from the Scientific School preached an *objective* approach to chess, Lasker was instead *subjective*. He wanted to win, period. And if that is best done by exploiting the opponent's weakness in, say, the endgame, then let's play an endgame, even if it was objectively better to stay in the middlegame! I am in great favour of this subjective approach to chess, and it forms the basis for my development of the basic framework in *Foundations of Chess Strategy*, where I divide chess-players into four distinct types – reflectors, theorists, activists and pragmatics, each with their own distinct style. However, Lasker was much more than just a practical player with a keen sense of the psychological mechanisms of a chess game. In more objective terms, he did bring chess to a new level. He acknowledged the work done by Steinitz and others – in fact he repeatedly praised his predecessor and his contributions to chess – but he was not bound by the dogmas of the Scientific School. As Soltis points out, Lasker was ready to violate general principles, if there was some specific reason for it. In this sense he was the forerunner of the later eras of New Dynamism and Creative Concreteness (see Chapters 4 and 6).

One of the points where Lasker differed from Steinitz was in the perception of *weaknesses* vs *targets*. The Scientific School was very concerned not to create any 'weaknesses' in its own camp, and for some (weaker) players from that school it almost became an obsession not to weaken the position, so that they ended up playing too passively. However, Steinitz's notion of weaknesses was rather *abstract* and *general*. In contrast, Lasker looked for *specific targets* in the *concrete position*. If a weakness could not be targeted, Lasker didn't care much about it. This battle between the *general* strategic characteristics (Steinitz) and the *specific* features (Lasker) of a position is an ongoing debate even in contemporary top-level chess. A very good example is this one, which in a sense decided the World Championship in 2007.

Anand – Morozevich

World Ch, Mexico City 2007

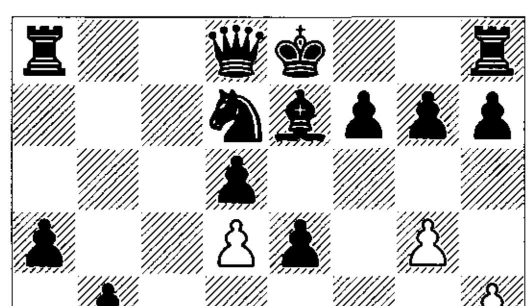
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 f3 e5 7 ♘b3 ♗e6 8 ♗e3 ♘bd7

This line in the Najdorf Variation is fashionable at the highest level these days. Anand apparently prefers the white side, whereas Topalov plays it with both colours. As Black, the Bulgarian usually prefers 8...h5!? (a restricting measure against White's intended g4, played in the spirit of Nimzowitsch!); e.g., 9 ♘d5 (9 ♕d2 ♘bd7 10 a4 ♗e7 11 ♗e2 ♕c7 12 0-0 0-0 with an interesting position, Leko-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2008) 9...♗xd5 10 exd5 ♘bd7 11 ♕d2 g6 12 0-0-0 ♘b6 13 ♕a5 ♗h6 14 ♗xh6 ♖xh6 15 ♔b1, and White was a little better and eventually won in Anand-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2008.

9 g4 ♘b6

Another possibility is 9...b5, but this received a blow in the game Topalov-Ivanchuk, Morelia/Linares 2008, where White won convincingly after 10 g5 b4 11 ♘d5 ♘xd5 12 exd5 ♗f5 13 ♗d3 ♗xd3 14 ♕xd3 ♗e7 15 h4 a5 *(D)*.

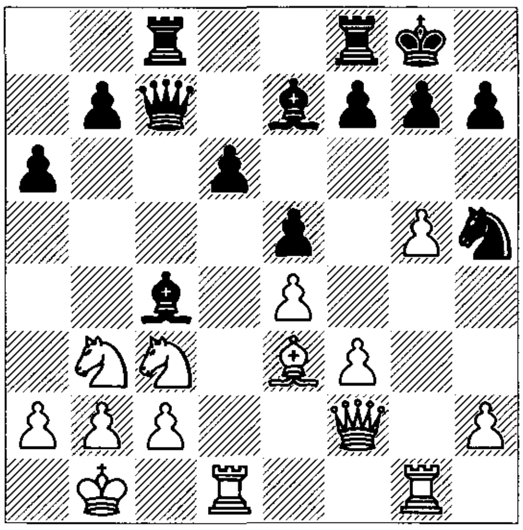
W



16 a3! (a rare occurrence in the Sicilian – White starts *positionally* probing Black's queenside pawns!) 16...a4 17 ♘d2 ♖b8 18 axb4 ♖xb4 19 ♕a3! ♕b8 20 c3 ♖xb2 21 ♕xa4 ♖b7 22 ♔e2! (the king feels completely safe in the centre as Black has no activity) 22...♖c7 23 ♖hb1 ♕c8 24 ♗b6 ♖b7 25 ♗a7! e4?! (insufficient, but Black was already in deep trouble; e.g., 25...0-0 26 ♖xb7 ♕xb7 27 ♕c6 ♕c8 28 ♖b1) 26 fxe4 ♖xb1 27 ♖xb1 0-0 28 ♕c6 ♘e5 29 ♕xc8 ♖xc8 30 ♖b8 ♖xb8 31 ♗xb8, and White was winning.

10 g5 ♘h5 11 ♕d2 ♖c8 12 0-0-0 ♗e7 13 ♖g1 0-0 14 ♔b1 ♕c7 15 ♕f2 ♘c4 16 ♗xc4 ♗xc4 *(D)*

W



Here we go. Black has a backward pawn on d6 and consequently White has a great square on d5, so I am sure the Scientific School would on general grounds prefer White here. However, as we shall see, things are far from clear.

17 ♘d5

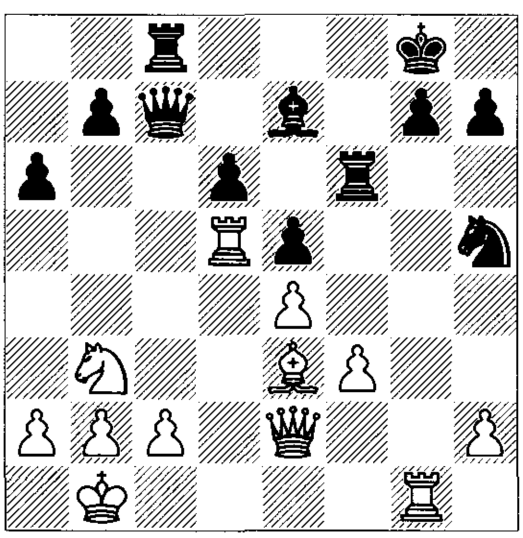
Forcing Black to give up one of his bishops.

17...♗xd5 18 ♖xd5 f5!

Black seeks counterplay down the f-file.

19 gxf6 ♖xf6 20 ♕e2 *(D)*

B



An excellent position to illustrate the difference between a general Steinitzian and a specific Laskerian approach to chess. When I followed this game live on the Internet, I instinctively thought that White was better and that Black's next move was a mistake. Trained as I am in the Scientific and Hypermodern traditions, I envisaged a white knight on d5, a bad black bishop and a weak backward pawn on d6. However, this (Steinitzian) evaluation is superficial. This line of thought is too *general*. While White certainly does dream of repositioning the knight to d5 (and eventually actually manages to do it), the d6-pawn is currently securely defended by the 'bad' bishop on e7. It is only a weakness in the long-term abstract sense, not in the short-term concrete sense. Black, on the other hand, has a *specific* and easily accessible *target* at f3. He simply intends to batter up against White's f3-pawn, which in the short run – as long as White has not had time to execute his knight manoeuvre to d5 – is at least as vulnerable as the d6-pawn. A more balanced evaluation of the position is therefore that both sides have their plans and trumps, and the position is close to a dynamic equilibrium.

20...♘f4?!

Anand, in his notes in *New In Chess*, labels this premature. Black had other moves, such as 20...♔h8, 20...g6 or 20...♖f7, waiting for White to show his hand before committing to this exchange of bishop for knight.

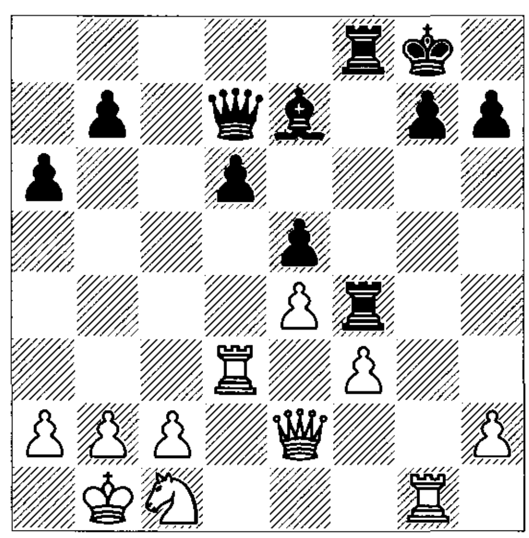
21 ♗xf4 ♖xf4 22 ♖d3!

Anand overprotects the vulnerable f3-pawn while clearing d5 for the knight.

22...♕d7! 23 ♘c1! ♖cf8 *(D)*

Both sides follow their intended plans – White prepares to manoeuvre the knight to d5, Black to target the f3-pawn (and, as we shall see, the white h-pawn).

W



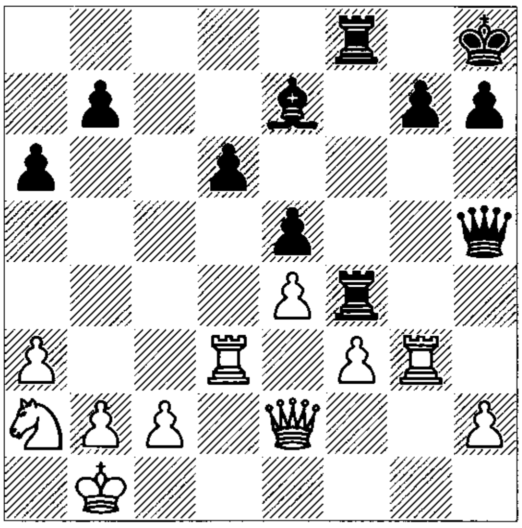
24 a3! ♔h8?!

This is unnecessary and loses valuable time. When following a 'Lasker approach', there is rarely time for such luxury moves. Anand gives 24...♕h3 25 ♖g3 ♕h6 followed by ...♖h4, after which he judges Black to be OK.

25 ♘a2! ♕h3 26 ♖g3 ♕h5! *(D)*

Black shows that there is more than one target in the white position. Now he directs his attention toward the h-pawn.

W



27 ♕g2!

Necessary to be able to play h3.

27...♖h4 28 h3 ♕h6!

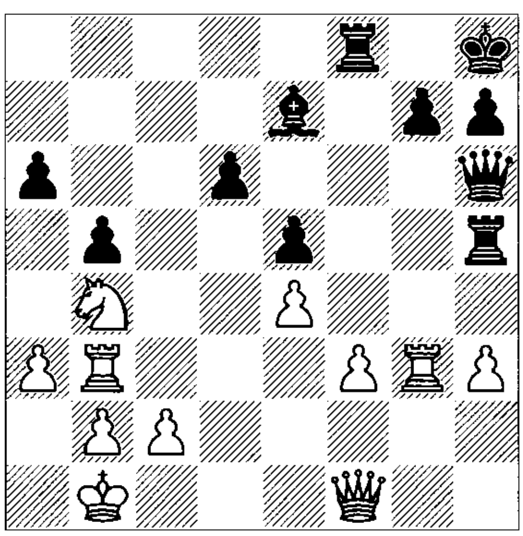
Introducing a shrewd idea. Black intends ...♖h5 followed by ...♗h4, and when the white rook moves the bishop retreats, after which h3 is hanging. Then White has to go back to g3 with the rook, allowing ...♗h4 with a repetition of moves. The question is whether White has something quick to circumvent this drawing scheme. Anand finds a good way forward: he goes after Black's queenside pawns.

29 ♖b3! b5 30 ♘b4

The knight is finally about to reach d5, in the process hitting a6.

30...♖h5 31 ♕f1 *(D)*

B



31...♖h4!

The threat of 32...♖xe4 forces the white queen to retreat.

32 ♕g2 ♖h5

Now Anand has a tough choice. He can either repeat moves and accept a draw by 33 ♕f1 ♖h4 34 ♕g2, or he can go in for the somewhat murky game continuation. He probably made the right choice but it was undoubtedly a tough call given that this was the 11th round of the World Championship and he already had the lead. Good judgement!

33 ♘xa6!? ♗h4 34 ♖g4 ♗f6?!

Blocking the f-file looks wrong – 34...♗d8 is more natural.

35 ♕e2?

This is a mistake according to Anand. Better was 35 ♕f1 ♖xh3 36 ♖g1!, covering the first rank. Then White can go ♘b4-d5 and take on b5. Now it is less clear, although it seems that White maintains the upper hand.

35...♖xh3 36 ♖xb5 ♗d8 37 ♖b8 ♕f6 38 ♘b4 ♖xf3 39 ♘d5

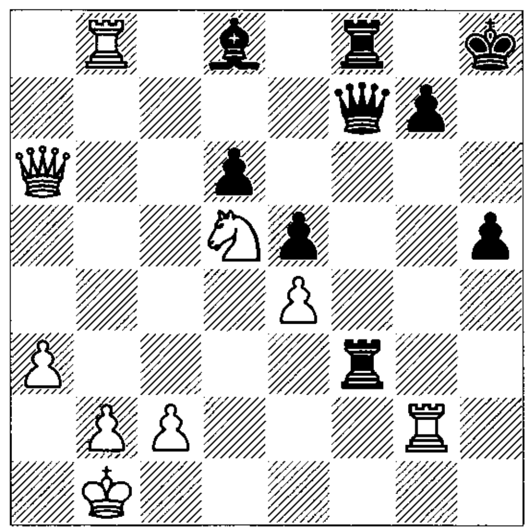
At last the knight has reached this square!

39...♕f7 40 ♕a6 h5!

However, Black's passed pawns give him some counterplay.

41 ♖g2 *(D)*

B



41...h4?

Now Black is lost. What both players missed during the game was the resource 41...♕e6 42 ♕a8 ♕g8!. Such backwards queen moves are often hard to see. Although White remains on top according to Anand, things are far from clear.

42 ♕xd6 ♗e7 43 ♕xe5 ♖xb8 44 ♕xb8+ ♔h7 45 ♕c7 ♗f8

Anand's second Peter Heine Nielsen pointed out a nice try for Black here: 45...♖xa3!? 46 bxa3 ♕f1+ 47 ♔b2 ♗xa3+ 48 ♔xa3 ♕xg2, and the h-pawn should not be underestimated. However, he also gave the refutation: 49 ♕f4! h3 50 ♕f5+! ♔h6 (50...g6 51 ♕f8, threatening 52 ♘f6# or 50...♔h8 51 ♘e7, winning) 51 ♘f4!, and White wins.

46 ♕xf7 ♖xf7 47 ♖g4!

Anand forces the black rook to take up an awkward position in front of the pawn. As is

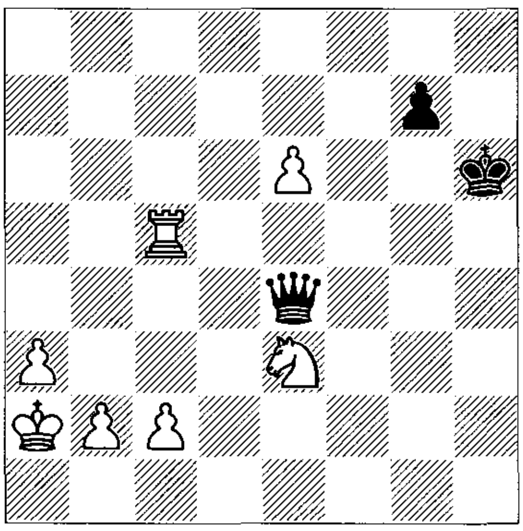
well-known, a rook should rather be *behind* a passed pawn.

47...♖f1+ 48 ♔a2 ♖h1 49 e5 ♗c5 50 e6 ♔h6 51 ♖c4 h3 52 ♖xc5!

The most straightforward way to win. Black is allowed to queen but the lone queen will be no match for a rook, a knight and a powerful e6-pawn.

52...h2 53 ♘e3 ♖a1+ 54 ♔xa1 h1♕+ 55 ♔a2 ♕e4 *(D)*

W



56 ♖e5! 1-0

The e-pawn is unstoppable after 56...♕a8 (56...♕xe5? 57 ♘g4+) 57 e7 ♕e8 58 ♘f5+ and 59 ♘d6.

In 1894 and 1896 Lasker beat Steinitz in matches for the World Championship. In a way the present game can provide Steinitz some comfort – here 'his approach' turned out victorious!

Capablanca: Transformation of Advantages

Lasker was World Champion for 27 years – from 1894 to 1921 – and his successor was the Cuban legend Jose Raul Capablanca. Few players in chess history have possessed the natural talent of Capablanca, but unfortunately his working efforts did not match his talent – the Cuban was a 'man of the world' who knew how to enjoy life – and this laziness was probably a major reason for his loss of the world title after only six years, in 1927, to the hard-working Alexander Alekhine.

But Capablanca's contribution to chess goes far beyond his rather brief – in relation to his immense talent – reign as World Champion. The perhaps best-known concept attributed to Capablanca is that of *transformation of advantages*. Steinitz before him had discussed the concept of advantage in detail. Capablanca added a significant extra component to the understanding of advantages by highlighting the *dynamic* nature of advantages. While this had already been mentioned by Steinitz – who talked about *temporary* vs *sustainable* advantages – it was Capablanca who elevated this notion to higher importance. During the course of a game, advantages are traded on a continuous basis, and it is not just a question of *collecting* advantages; you must continuously be ready to *trade* advantages for other, hopefully bigger ones.

Capablanca himself exploited this concept in a number of fine games. Let's look at some games from the great Cuban's hand. The first one is taken from the famous tournament in New York 1927. In this tournament, which acted as a kind of candidates' tournament to decide who should be allowed to challenge Capablanca, the reigning World Champion was in a class of his own, despite world-class opposition. Few could have expected that he was only months away from losing his world title to the runner-up, Alekhine, who finished no fewer than 2½ points behind the Cuban in this tournament.

Capablanca – Vidmar
New York 1927

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 ♘a5?!

This move, which was rather popular at the beginning of the 20th century, has now been superseded by Chigorin's move-order 8...0-0 9 h3 ♘a5.

9 ♗c2 c5 10 d4 ♕c7 11 ♘bd2 0-0 12 h3?!

Since Black has already played ...♘a5 – thus releasing the pressure on White's centre – White could do without h3 here. This is the main reason why in contemporary games it is more popular for Black to castle before moving the knight.

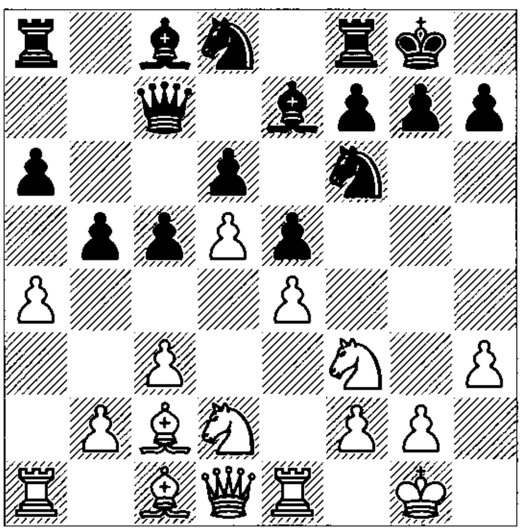
12...♘c6

By transposition we now have reached a 'normal' Chigorin position, in which 12...cxd4

13 cxd4 and now 13...♘c6 or 13...♗d7 are the main contemporary choices. The text-move, on the other hand, has largely gone out of fashion because it allows White to collect two minor advantages: space and a somewhat misplaced knight on d8. It is highly instructive to see how Capablanca systematically transforms these two micro-advantages into more tangible ones in the course of the game.

13 d5 ♘d8 14 a4! *(D)*

B



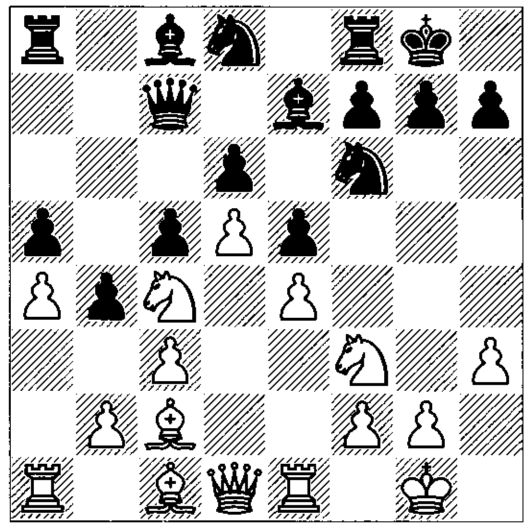
14...b4?!

This seems excessively obedient, as it hands White another small asset for free, the c4-square. However, other moves also fail to equalize. 46 years later, two other World Champions – one former and one future – reached the same position. The game Karpov-Spassky, USSR Ch, Moscow 1973 continued 14...♖b8 15 axb5 axb5 16 b4 c4 17 ♘f1 ♘e8 18 ♘3h2 f6 19 f4 ♘f7 20 ♘f3 g6 21 f5 ♘g7 22 g4, with advantage for White because of his extra space and possession of the open a-file. However, Spassky managed to draw – and eventually won the USSR Championship, a point ahead of Karpov, Petrosian, Polugaevsky, Korchnoi and Kuzmin – after an eventful game in which Karpov was momentarily a piece up for two pawns but still had to be happy with the draw.

15 ♘c4 a5 *(D)*

White has emerged from the opening with some advantage due to his extra space and the strong knight on c4 vs a passive one on d8. My analysis engine – Shredder – suggests the perfectly sensible 16 ♗d3 in order to grab hold of the light squares on the queenside. However, Capablanca has other ideas. He is ready to trade the aforementioned advantages for two others – an ending in which he possesses the two bishops

W



and Black has a somewhat weak pawn-structure to boot.

16 ♘fxe5! ♗a6 17 ♗b3!

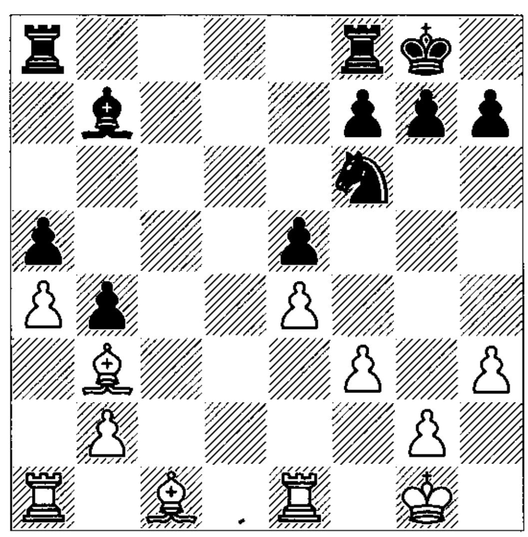
This calm move is the backbone of White's small combination – without it White would just lose a piece.

17...dxe5 18 d6 ♗xd6 19 ♕xd6 ♕xd6 20 ♘xd6 ♘b7?!

It seems natural to exchange the hitherto passive knight for White's advanced one, but perhaps 20...♖b8 was better, to disturb White's coordination by threatening 21...bxc3.

21 ♘xb7 ♗xb7 22 cxb4 cxb4 23 f3 *(D)*

B



This was the position that Capablanca was aiming for. None of his prior advantages exist any more. However, in return he has the two bishops, and Black's a5-pawn in particular is vulnerable, especially after the unavoidable exchange of the major pieces. Conclusion: Capablanca has *transformed* his initial advantage into a bigger one by being open to trades of advantages.

23...♖fd8 24 ♗e3 h6 25 ♖ed1!

Black's problem is that in the long run he cannot avoid the exchange of all the rooks, after which the a5-pawn is dead meat. Notice too

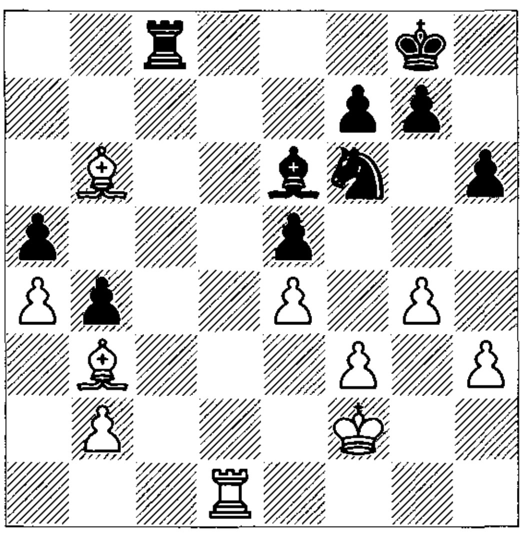
that the black knight has no natural outpost in the centre where it can be safely placed and protected by a pawn. This was already outlined by Steinitz in his theory for how to exploit the two bishops: make sure that the knight has no good foothold in the centre!

25...♗c6 26 ♖ac1 ♗e8 27 ♔f2 ♖xd1 28 ♖xd1 ♖c8 29 g4!

White plans to expand his advantage by gaining space on the kingside by h4 and g5, in the process depriving the knight of its only really safe spot close to the centre.

29...♗d7 30 ♗b6 ♗e6 *(D)*

W



Now we see another small trade of advantages. Black has managed to force the exchange of one of White's bishops, thus depriving him of the advantage of the bishop-pair. However, in return he has to accept a further weakening of his pawn-structure – a doubled e-pawn – and, worse, the exchange of the last pair of rooks, after which the a-pawn finally falls.

31 ♗xe6 fxe6

Black could retain the rooks by interpolating 31...♖c2+, but after 32 ♔e3 fxe6 33 ♖d2!, both of his queenside pawns are going to drop off.

32 ♖d8+! ♖xd8 33 ♗xd8 ♘d7 34 ♗xa5 ♘c5 35 b3!

The final subtlety. White ascertains that he keeps his outside a-pawn, as he knows that a knight is a poor defender against such a far-away pawn. The end is near.

35...♘xb3 36 ♗xb4 ♘d4 37 a5 1-0

Let's recapitulate. White obtained some advantage out of the opening in the form of extra space and more active knights. These advantages were then traded for two other ones, the two bishops and a vulnerable black a-pawn. When Black managed to exchange off one of the bishops, it was at the cost of a further weakening of the pawn-structure, and eventually the loss of a pawn. Only at this late point in the game the advantage turned from being *positional* in nature and into a tangible *material* gain. This is a typical pattern in high-level games. It looks simple in the hands of one of the greatest positional players of chess history, doesn't it?

Marshall – Capablanca

Match (game 23), New York 1909

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c5

The Tarrasch Variation, named after the great German doctor. Tarrasch was a giant figure in chess history and contributed greatly to the advance of chess understanding through not only his play but also his books. However, sometimes he was excessively dogmatic in his writings. Seen from a contemporary perspective it is somewhat humorous that he awarded the classical 3...♘f6 a question mark ("too passive") while he awarded his own 3...c5 an exclamation mark ("the right way to obtain active play").

4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 g3 ♗e6

This subvariation of the Tarrasch has now gone out of fashion, as few contemporary grandmasters dare to venture into the endgame that White can force on move 9. 6...♘f6 7 ♗g2 ♗e7 8 0-0 0-0 is the main line, in which the light-squared bishop often goes to g4.

7 ♗g2 ♗e7 8 0-0 ♘f6 9 ♗g5

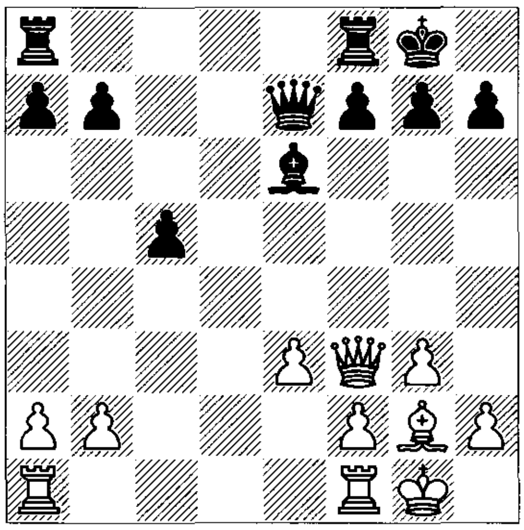
Not bad, but contemporary theory prefers 9 dxc5 ♗xc5 10 ♗g5 0-0 11 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 12 ♘xd5 ♕xb2 13 ♘c7 ♖ad8 14 ♕c1! ♕xc1 15 ♖axc1, when White holds a nagging edge in the ending; e.g., 15...♗b6 16 ♘xe6 fxe6 17 ♖c4! h6 18 h4 ♖d6 19 ♖e4 ♖f6 20 ♗h3, with some pressure for White in L.B.Hansen-Antonio, Novi Sad Olympiad 1990.

9...♘e4 10 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 11 ♘e5?!

But this is clearly wrong, as Black now emerges with a small but steady advantage based on an outside pawn-majority. 11 ♖c1 is correct; e.g., 11...♘xc3 12 ♖xc3 c4 13 b3 cxb3 14 ♕xb3 0-0 15 ♖b1 with an edge for White, Manor-Zapata, Willemstad 2001.

11...♘xd4 12 ♘xe4 dxe4 13 e3 ♘f3+ 14 ♘xf3 exf3 15 ♕xf3 0-0 *(D)*

W



16 ♖fc1?

An instructive mistake – not just with regard to the move itself, but the entire concept that underlies it. Black's pawn-majority certainly is an asset, but passively attempting to restrain Black's pawn-majority won't cut it. In that case it is almost as if Black has an extra pawn. Instead, White has to play actively on the kingside, mobilizing *his* pawn-majority. That could, for instance, be done by 16 ♕e4 ♖ab8 17 f4! ♕f6 18 ♕c2, preparing e4-e5 with counterplay. This is an interesting version of the battle of advantages. While Black may hold an edge because of the clear plan of pushing the outside pawn-majority, White is still very much in the game. However, by passively *re*acting to Black's obvious strategy, White compounds the advantage. Instead, it would have been much better to *act* by exploiting White's own asset, the pawn-majority on the opposite wing. It is interesting that my analysis engine commits the same conceptual mistake by suggesting the insipid 16 b3 as White's best. This is another example of the problem with computers that in *How Chess Games are Won and Lost* I labelled "the understanding problem".

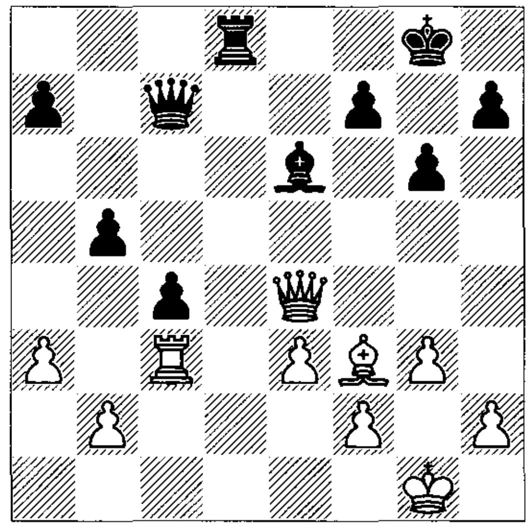
16...♖ab8 17 ♕e4 ♕c7 18 ♖c3?!

Continuing the flawed strategy. Here too 18 f4 came into consideration.

18...b5! 19 a3 c4 20 ♗f3 ♖fd8 21 ♖d1 ♖xd1+ 22 ♗xd1 ♖d8 23 ♗f3 g6 *(D)*

Over the last few moves, Black has consistently improved his position, whereas White's pieces are no better placed than eight moves ago. Usually it is necessary to give something to get something, but here Black has been allowed to have it all – mobile pawn-majority, possession of the only open file, and no counterplay on White's part whatsoever. That is more

W



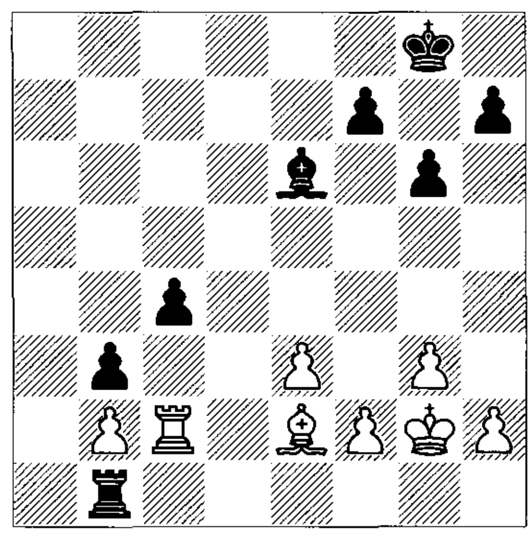
than enough for a player with Capablanca's technique.

24 ♕c6 ♕e5 25 ♕e4 ♕xe4 26 ♗xe4 ♖d1+ 27 ♔g2 a5!

The pawns start rolling!

28 ♖c2 b4 29 axb4 axb4 30 ♗f3 ♖b1 31 ♗e2 b3! *(D)*

W



32 ♖d2

32 ♖c3 loses to 32...♖xb2 33 ♗xc4 ♖c2!, but this is no better.

32...♖c1!

Black decisively threatens 33...♖c2. Now we see another *transformation of advantages*. Black wins material – to stop the pawns, White has to give up a piece.

33 ♗d1 c3! 34 bxc3 *(D)*

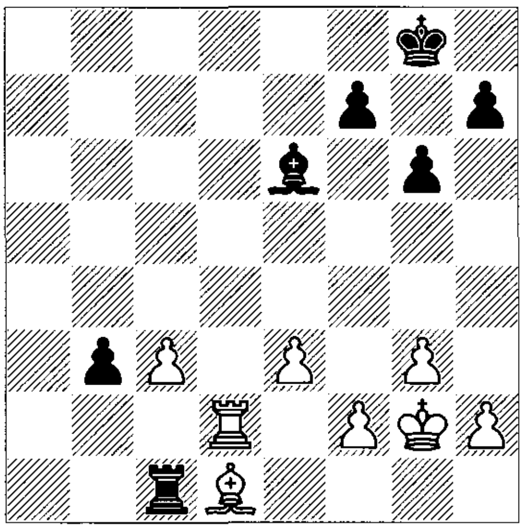
34...b2! 35 ♖xb2 ♖xd1

The rest is not too difficult, although it does take some time to convert the extra piece into a win.

36 ♖c2 ♗f5 37 ♖b2 ♖c1 38 ♖b3 ♗e4+ 39 ♔h3 ♖c2 40 f4 h5!

Black is weaving a mating-net around the white king – the threat is 41...♔g7, 42...♔h6 and 43...♗f5+. Thus White cannot prevent further material loss.

B



41 g4 hxg4+ 42 ♔xg4 ♖xh2 43 ♖b4 f5+ 44 ♔g3

44 ♔g5 ♔g7 mates.

44...♖e2 45 ♖c4 ♖xe3+ 46 ♔h4 ♔g7 47 ♖c7+ ♔f6 48 ♖d7 ♗g2!

Setting up another mating-net.

49 ♖d6+ ♔g7 0-1

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Steinitz's system of advantages includes three different types of advantage: material, positional, and initiative. In most games by Capablanca and other gifted positional players from the Scientific and Hypermodern Eras, small positional advantages were often the first ones to be obtained, usually in the transition from opening to middlegame, deriving from the superior understanding of the subtle positional factors of chess. Later in the game these small pluses were then typically traded for the initiative or transformed into a decisive material advantage, as we have seen in the previous two Capablanca games. However, positional advantages do not necessarily have to come first – this pattern only arose because of the somewhat more cautious – positional – approach to chess endorsed by proponents of the Scientific (and later Hypermodern) School, as compared to their predecessors from the Romantic Era. In Morphy or Anderssen's time, bold sacrifices (investing material in return for the initiative) often occurred as early as the opening, as witness the wild openings that were fashionable in those days. As we have already discussed in the previous chapter, this was a prudent approach at the time, since defensive skills were vastly under-developed. However, as defensive skills improved, the need for positional understanding increased, as it was no longer possible to win games by just 'throwing the kitchen sink' at the opponent, in the assumption that he would not find the right way to defuse the attack.

It is interesting, though, that in the present era, Creative Concreteness, we see a shift in the opposite direction. This tendency started in New Dynamism and has now expanded and manifested itself. As I shall discuss in further detail in Chapter 6, the present era is characterized (among other things) by a willingness to invest material early in the game for the initiative or even positional returns. For example, the Marshall Attack and the Anti-Moscow Variation in the Semi-Slav are hugely popular these days. In the first one Black sacrifices a pawn; in the second one it is White who throws a pawn into the fire in the hope of other advantages. History repeats itself, although on a more sophisticated level than in the Romantic Era!

Let's conclude this section by looking at two games by Capablanca, in which the Cuban legend sacrifices material for other gains – in the first one for an overwhelming positional advantage; in the second, for a decisive initiative in the form of a naked black king and a lethal cross-pin.

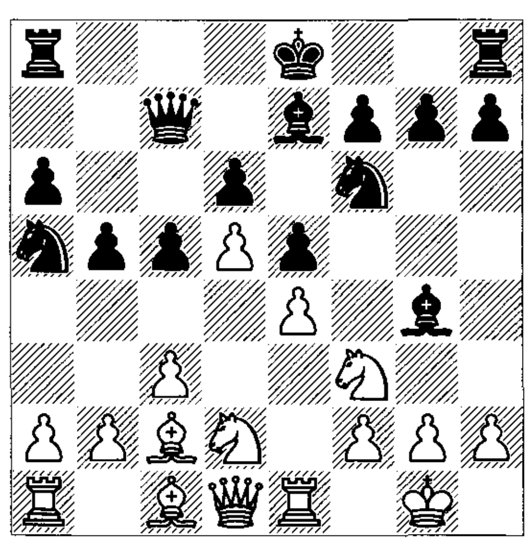
Capablanca – Yates
Hastings 1919

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 ♘a5?! 9 ♗c2 c5 10 d4 ♕c7 11 ♘bd2 ♗g4?!

Black has employed the same inaccurate move-order as in Capablanca-Vidmar above. Black is not really willing to give up his light-squared bishop for White's knight, and thus the bishop will soon have to retreat.

12 d5 *(D)*

B

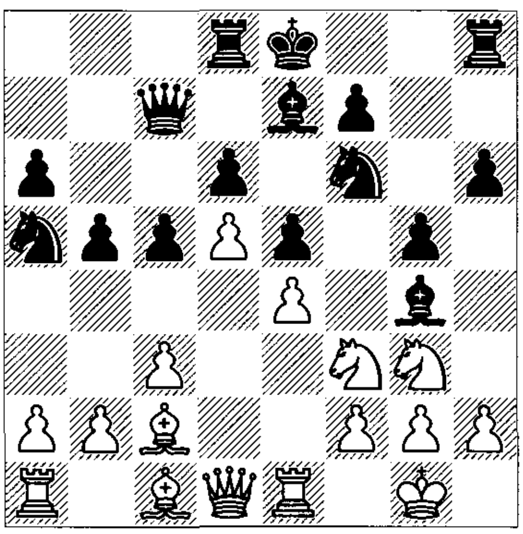


12...g5?

While 11...♗g4 was merely time-consuming, this is just bad. Black is never going to be able to build an attack on the kingside – his pieces are not in position for that – and the text-move creates eternal flaws in Black's position. In particular, the f5-square is now critically weak – especially if Black has to part with his light-squared bishop. So Capablanca sets out to exploit the weakness of the f5-square. Stage one is to bring the queen's knight in position to jump to f5; stage two is to force Black to part with his light-squared bishop. For that purpose, Capablanca is willing to invest material – a different kind of transformation of advantages.

13 ♘f1! h6 14 ♘g3 ♖d8 *(D)*

W



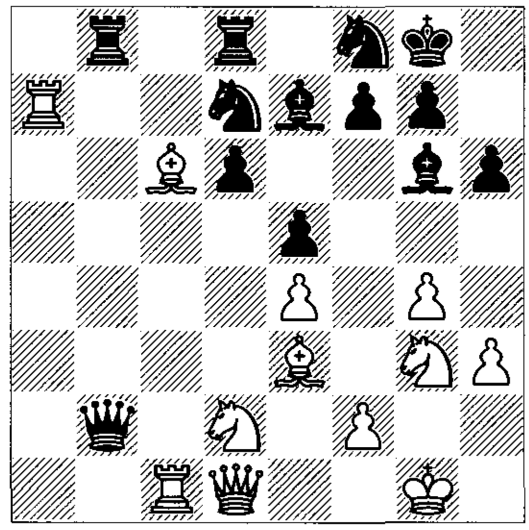
15 a4!

Stage one – the knight transfer – has been completed; now Capablanca initiates stage two.

15...b4?!

As in Capablanca-Vidmar, it would be better for Black to maintain control of the light squares by keeping the pawn on b5 as long as possible. However, this is also not without problems, because the pawn on b5 often ends up weak in the Ruy Lopez. Another Capablanca game, against Black in New York 1916, shows what may happen to Black in the Ruy Lopez if he is not careful: 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 d6 7 c3 0-0 8 d4 b5 9 ♗c2 ♗g4 10 d5 ♘b8 11 h3 ♗h5?! (the bishop will be out of play here; 11...♗c8 followed by 12...c6 is better) 12 ♘bd2 ♘bd7 13 ♘f1 ♖e8? (with the centre already closed, this makes little sense; 13...♘b6 is more natural) 14 g4 ♗g6 15 ♘g3 h6 16 a4! ♘h7 17 ♕e2! ♖b8 18 axb5 axb5 19 b4! ♕c8 20 ♗d3! (White systematically encircles the b5-pawn) 20...c6 21 dxc6 ♕xc6 22 ♖a5! ♕xc3 23 ♗xb5 ♕c7 (23...♕xb4? 24 ♗d2 costs Black a piece) 24 ♗e3 ♖ed8 25 ♖c1 ♕b7 26 ♗c6! ♕xb4 27 ♖a4 ♕b3 28 ♖a7! ♘hf8 29 ♘d2 ♕b2 30 ♕d1! *(D)*.

B



Black's queen will be trapped after 31 ♖c2 ♕b4 32 ♖a4, and Capablanca went on to win the game.

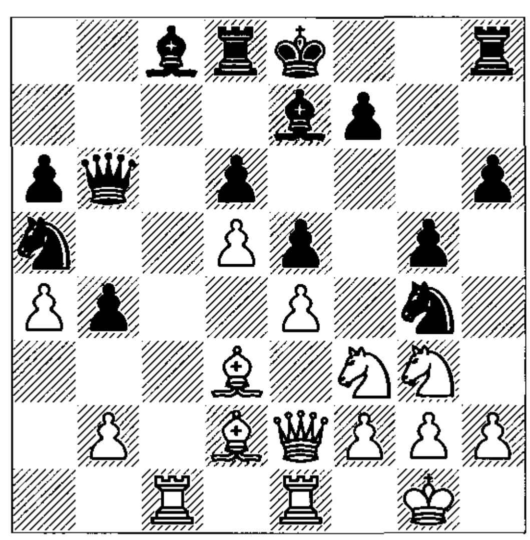
16 cxb4 cxb4 17 ♗d3 ♗c8 18 ♗e3 ♘g4 19 ♖c1 ♕b8

After 19...♘xe3 20 fxe3! (20 ♖xc7 ♘xd1 21 ♖xd1 ♘b3! is OK for Black) 20...♕b6 21 ♘d2! followed by 22 ♘c4, Black will very likely end up in a position with a bad dark-squared bishop vs a dominant white knight on f5.

20 ♗d2 ♕b6 21 ♕e2!? *(D)*

21 ♖e2 and 21 ♖f1 are fine, but the text-move sets a small positional trap. By abandoning protection of b3, Capablanca gives Yates the impression that he can now transfer his knight to c5...

B



21...♘b3?! 22 ♖c6 ♕a5 23 ♗xa6! ♗d7

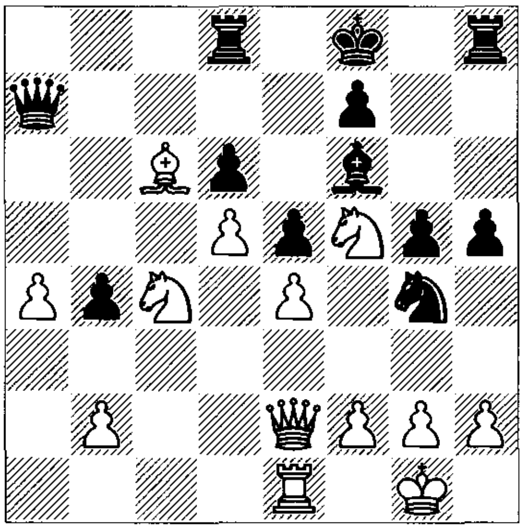
This was Yates's idea. After 24 ♖c2?! ♕xa4 followed by 25...♘c5, Black is more or less OK. But...

24 ♗b5!

A devastating *positional exchange sacrifice* of the kind that Petrosian would later adopt and refine.

24...♗xc6 25 ♗xc6+ ♔f8 26 ♕c4! ♘xd2 27 ♘xd2 ♕a7 28 ♕e2 h5 29 ♘f5 ♗f6 30 ♘c4 *(D)*

B



Absolute positional domination. Despite his nominal material advantage of an exchange for a pawn, Black is utterly lost here.

30...♕c5 31 b3 ♘h6 32 ♘xh6 ♖xh6 33 ♕e3! ♖c8 34 ♖c1 ♗d8?

A blunder in a lost position. Better was 34...♕xe3, although White should win without too much trouble after 35 fxe3! (more direct than 35 ♘xe3) 35...♗d8 36 a5 ♖c7 37 ♖a1 ♖a7 38 ♖a4, and White picks up the b4-pawn after 39 a6 and 40 ♗b7.

35 ♕xc5 dxc5 36 ♘xe5 ♔e7 37 ♖xc5 f5 38 ♖c4 ♗a5 39 ♗b5! ♖xc4 40 ♘xc4 ♗c7 41 e5 ♗b8 42 ♘e3! ♖h7 43 ♘xf5+ ♔f7 44 e6+ ♔f6 45 e7 ♖xe7 46 ♘xe7 ♔xe7 47 g3

Even with opposite-coloured bishops, Black is defenceless here – three pawns are too much.

47...♗c7 48 ♔g2 ♔d6 49 ♗e8 h4 50 ♗f7 ♔e5 51 ♔h3 ♗d8 52 ♔g4 hxg3 53 fxg3!

In endings with opposite-coloured bishops, it is better that the pawns are as far apart as possible.

53...♔f6 54 ♗e6 ♔g6 55 d6 ♔f6 56 ♗f5 ♗b6 57 d7 ♗d8 58 h4 gxh4 59 gxh4 ♗c7 60 h5 ♔g7 61 ♗e4 1-0

Capablanca – Schroeder
New York 1916

1 d4 d5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c4 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 ♘bd7 5 ♗g5 ♗e7 6 e3 0-0 7 ♖c1 a6!?

This old line has experienced a small revival recently. The main move is 7...c6.

8 ♕c2

Today 8 c5 is more frequently seen. One example is Topalov-P.H.Nielsen, Dortmund 2005: 8...c6 9 ♗d3 e5! 10 dxe5 ♘e8 11 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 12 ♕c2 h6 13 e4!? ♘xe5 14 ♘xe5 ♕xe5 15 0-0 dxe4 16 ♘xe4 ♘f6 17 ♖fe1 ♘xe4 18 ♖xe4 ♕c7 19 ♖ce1 ♗e6, and Black gradually equalized.

8...♖e8?!

A big question in this type of position is always whether Black should interpolate ...h6. Is it a useful way to create *luft* or is it a potential weakness? Here the answer seems to be that it is useful, as the pawn is then not hanging and g5 is protected. In Gligorić-Petrosian, Tbilisi 1973, the solid former World Champion drew without too much trouble: 8...h6 9 ♗h4 dxc4 10 ♗xc4 b5 11 ♗d3 c5! 12 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 13 ♗h7+ ♔h8 14 ♗e4 ♖a7 15 0-0 cxd4 16 exd4 ♖c7 17 ♕b3 ♗e7 18 ♘e2 ♘f6 19 ♖xc7 ♕xc7 20 ♖c1 ♕b6 21 ♗c6 ♗d6 22 a4 ½-½.

9 ♗d3 dxc4 10 ♗xc4 b5 11 ♗d3 ♗b7

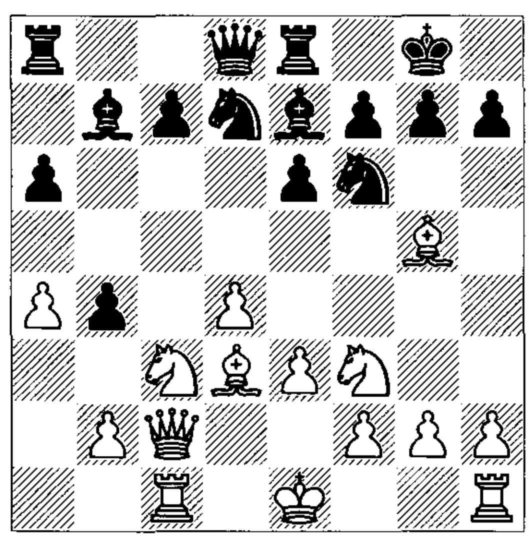
The direct 11...c5, analogous to Gligorić-Petrosian, deserves serious attention.

12 a4!

Capablanca was always fond of this move when Black had a pawn on b5 – the objective is to seize the light squares.

12...b4 *(D)*

W



13 ♗xf6!

Excellent positional understanding. Capablanca senses that in this kind of position, with the fight revolving around the liberating break ...c5, a knight is often better than a bishop. Later this became standard procedure in the Catalan; witness the variation 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 ♗g2 ♗e7 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 0-0 dxc4 7 ♕c2 a6 8 ♕xc4 b5 9 ♕c2 ♗b7 10 ♗g5 ♘bd7, when

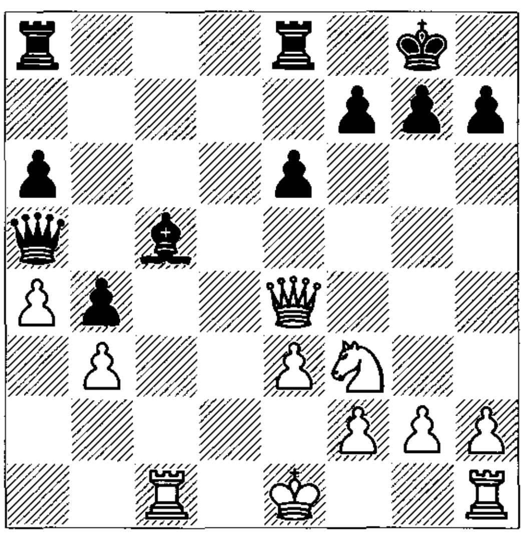
11 ♗xf6! ♘xf6 12 ♘bd2, with a tiny edge, is considered White's best. I have employed this variation extensively as White myself, but the current stance of theory is that it doesn't offer White much.

13...♘xf6 14 ♘e4 ♘xe4 15 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 16 ♕xe4 c5

More or less forced, as otherwise White blocks the pawn by 17 ♖c6 with a solid positional advantage. However, as Black fights to regain the pawn, we shall see another transformation of advantages: from a positional pull, Capablanca suddenly throws himself at Black's abandoned king and obtains a decisive attack.

17 dxc5 ♕a5 18 b3 ♗xc5 *(D)*

W



19 ♘g5!

Suddenly the lonely black king is in dire straits. Now it would really have been nice to have interpolated ...h6!

19...h6?

This is hopeless for Black. Better was 19...g6 (19...f5? allows 20 ♕c4 with a double attack on c5 and e6), when White has a choice between liquidating to a favourable ending with a strong knight vs a poor bishop with 20 ♕e5 ♗b6 21 ♕xa5 ♗xa5 22 ♘e4, or continuing to play for a kingside attack with 20 ♕f4 or 20 ♕h4. In all cases Black is in for a hard time, but it is still much better than what happens to him in the game.

20 ♕h7+ ♔f8 21 ♕h8+!?

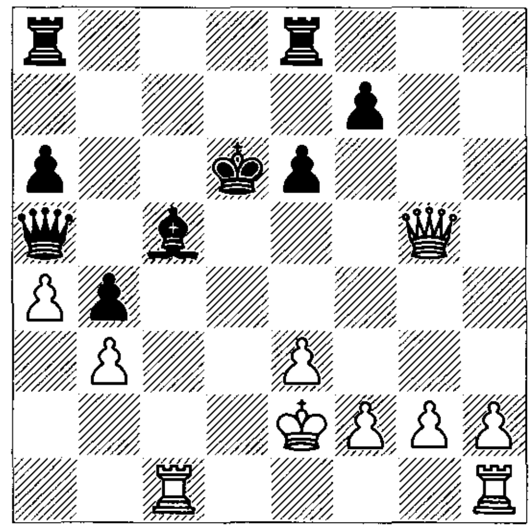
Playing for the gallery. The calm 21 ♘e4 was surely more than sufficient. Instead, Capablanca sacrifices a piece for an irresistible attack – once more a *transformation of advantages*, this time between material and attack.

21...♔e7 22 ♕xg7 hxg5 23 ♕xg5+ ♔d6

Necessary as otherwise the bishop falls.

24 ♔e2! *(D)*

B



This was Capablanca's idea. The hitherto passive rook on h1 enters the game with decisive force.

24...♖ac8 25 ♖c4! ♔c6 26 ♖hc1 ♔b6 27 h4!

Black is completely tied up, and Capablanca now uses the h-pawn as a decoy.

27...f5

After 27...♖c7 Capablanca gives the neat variation 28 h5 ♖ec8 29 h6 ♗d6 30 ♕xa5+ ♔xa5 31 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 (31...♗xc7 32 ♖c6!) 32 ♖xc7 ♗xc7 33 f4! ♗d8 34 g4 ♗f6 35 g5 ♗h8 36 e4 ♔b6 37 f5 exf5 38 exf5 ♔c5 39 g6 fxg6 40 fxg6, and 41 g7 wins.

28 ♕g7! ♖e7 29 ♕e5 ♖c6?!

A concluding blunder, but Black had no defence anyway.

30 ♖xc5! 1-0

White wins after 30...♕xc5 31 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 32 ♕d6+ or 30...♖xc5 31 ♕d6+.

Alekhine: The Transitionary Figure

The rise of Alexander Alekhine to World Champion marked the beginning of new times in chess. The rather static approach perfected by the Scientific School was gradually replaced by an appreciation of the importance of dynamism in chess. This transition was initiated by Alekhine, but it would take two decades before dynamism was fully incorporated into chess thinking in the age called New Dynamism. For much of the intervening period the Hypermodern School stood in the foreground.

Alekhine is perhaps predominantly known for his beautiful combinations and tactical vision, but the French-Russian's influence on the game goes far beyond that, although these skills were his principal natural gift. However, during his career Alekhine showed that he was capable of adapting his game, and continuously expanded his arsenal of weapons by learning from predecessors and peers. Alekhine became the first really universal player. Tartakower put it aptly: "For universality of style Alekhine has no rivals, since whereas Philidor mainly constructs pawn-chains, Morphy attacks the king, Steinitz aims for methodicalness, Lasker for flexibility, and Capablanca for logicality, Alekhine, in contrast to all these champions, seeks a struggle as such." This multi-faceted and pragmatic style – albeit with a special gift for the tactical – overwhelmed his more classically trained and one-sided peers. In *My Great Predecessors, Volume 1*, Kasparov gives his explanation of how Alekhine – to the surprise of many who saw the Cuban as almost invincible – could defeat Capablanca in the match for the World Championship: "In this match [Capablanca] generally sensed dynamics worse than his opponent and played more static chess, trying to break up large-scale problems into small ones and to solve them easily by the parts ... In intricate, undetermined positions with mutual weaknesses Capablanca's brilliant intuition gave him trouble, and he would begin losing the thread of the game. Alekhine thought in a more non-standard way, keenly observed the correlation of the weaknesses and which pieces needed to be exchanged and which retained. This was a serious step forward in the development of chess thinking, and Capa proved to be not ready for it."

Contrary to many other World Champions, Alekhine didn't stagnate when he won the world title, but kept improving, and he reached his peak in the early 1930s with brilliant victories in, e.g., San Remo 1930 (14/15 in a field of world-class players!) and Bled 1931 (20½/26, 5½ points ahead of runner-up Bogoljubow!).

Alekhine himself described his approach to chess: "I do not play chess – I fight at chess. Therefore I willingly combine the tactical with the strategic, the fantastic with the scientific, the combinative with the positional, and I aim to respond to the demands of each given position." With this flexible and versatile approach to chess, Alekhine turned out to be the transition figure that elevated chess from one era to the next, and even further on to subsequent eras. As we shall see, Alekhine could play in the strictly positional style of Steinitz and Capablanca; in the intriguing new style of Réti and Nimzowitsch; in the aggressive, dynamic style that was later to be perfected by Bronstein and Tal; and in the universal style of Fischer and Karpov. Indeed, traces of Alekhine's legacy underlie even the current era of Creative Concreteness; the casual sacrifice of pawns for long-lasting initiative that is one of the defining characteristics of the current era would have pleased the old sorcerer.

Let us first look at one of those dynamic games that elevated Alekhine to eternal stardom in the world of chess.

Alekhine – Nimzowitsch

Bled 1931

1 e4 e6

Alekhine was himself an adherent of the French Defence.

2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♘e2!?

A comparatively rare move – 4 e5 is the main line – which Alekhine had never used before this game. However, he had good reasons for doing so against this particular opponent: "A perfectly harmless move. I selected it, however, because I knew that on a previous occasion (Thomas-Nimzowitsch, Marienbad 1925) Nimzowitsch had shown an exaggerated voracity (6...f5) without being duly punished for it." We see Alekhine, in the footsteps of the great Lasker, as a shrewd psychologist! The occasion was particularly well chosen, since in *My System* Nimzowitsch advised that offered *central* pawns should be grabbed if there was no immediate refutation in sight. With a high degree of certainty Alekhine could expect the principled Nimzowitsch to stick to his own advice!

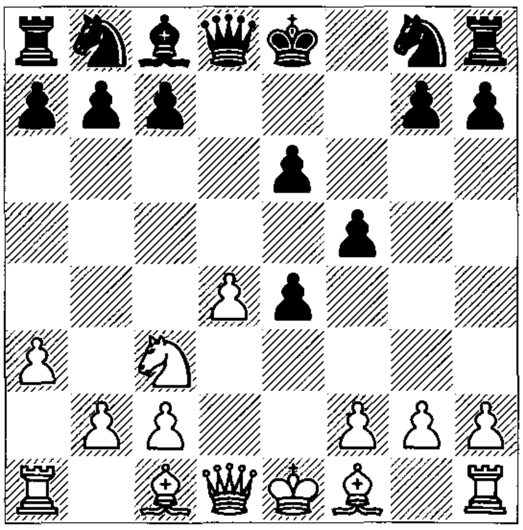
4...dxe4 5 a3 ♗xc3+

5...♗e7 6 ♘xe4 ♘c6! is considered safer and was played twice by Euwe against Alekhine in their 1935 World Championship match. However, the text-move is fine too; it is Black's next move that leads him down a risky road.

6 ♘xc3 f5?! *(D)*

Today it is well-known that 6...♘c6 is the safest move for Black, with decent play.

W



Here Nimzowitsch's propensity to stick to his principles and hold on to the central pawn makes itself felt. While concrete analysis suggests his decision was not in fact bad objectively speaking, I suspect that few modern grandmasters would venture into this. White obtains a lead in development and Black is left with irreparable holes on the dark squares. At best, it is an unnecessarily risky decision in a position where Black had a safe alternative of at least the same objective merits.

However, at the time Alekhine's approach of sacrificing material for long-term compensation was still in its infancy and poorly understood. As Kasparov explains in *My Great Predecessors*: "Alekhine was the first who could play material down for a long time as though nothing had happened. Chigorin also did this a little, but he did it more spontaneously, intuitively, whereas Alekhine did it quite deliberately! He could sacrifice material for some, at times unclear, compensation, and through lack of familiarity his opponents would usually be unable to comprehend the situation and would begin to drift. Not without reason did Alekhine's manner of play not appeal to Fischer – a player of classical style, who did not like giving up material 'just like that'. The forcible disruption of the balance irritated Fischer! However, for Alekhine it was the norm – to give up a couple of pawns (as in the game with Nimzowitsch) or even a piece, but to gain a strong initiative. In contrast to his colleagues, he knew fairly precisely in which positions it should all work out, and in which it would not." Nowadays we have a much more nuanced grasp of such positions, thanks to Alekhine's lead and the dynamic players he inspired.

7 f3!

Here you are – a (central) pawn for the initiative!

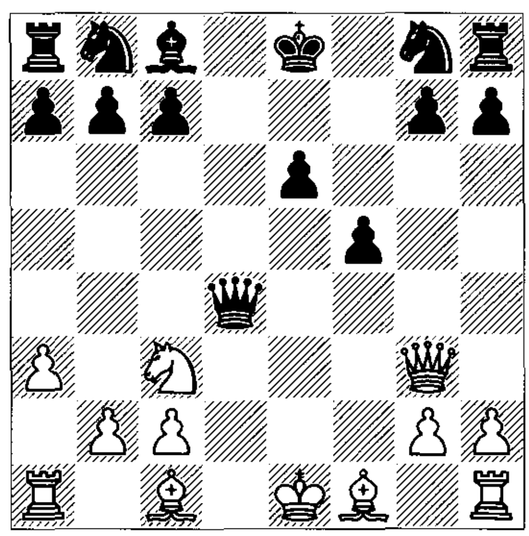
7...exf3 8 ♕xf3

And another one!

8...♕xd4

Nimzowitsch was a man of principle and of course he grabs the second pawn too, forcing Alekhine to prove that White's initiative compensates for two pawns. In the simultaneous game Alekhine-Wilkins, Washington DC 1933, Black first interpolated 8...♕h4+ before taking the pawn, but after 9 g3 ♕xd4 10 ♗f4 ♕d7 11 ♗d3 ♘f6 12 0-0-0 ♕f7 13 ♘b5 ♘d5 14 ♗xc7! 0-0 (14...♘xc7? 15 ♘d6+) 15 ♗d6 ♖d8 16 ♗c4! a6 17 ♗xd5 axb5 18 ♗b3 ♘a6 19 ♖he1 White had more than sufficient pressure for his pawn and duly went on to win.

B



9 ♕g3! *(D)*

White's dark-square domination is a key part of his dynamic compensation for the pawns.

9...♘f6!?

Nimzowitsch decides to return one of the pawns to shake off some of the pressure. In Alekhine's opinion this is the right choice; he labels 9...♘e7 10 ♗e3 ♕f6 11 0-0-0 as "insufficient". However, as Kasparov points out, things are not so clear after 11...c6 12 ♗g5 ♕g6 13 h4 0-0 14 h5 ♕f7. Still, the text-move is not bad – Black's mistake only comes later. However, it is a safe bet that Nimzowitsch did not feel comfortable in this dynamic and non-standard position.

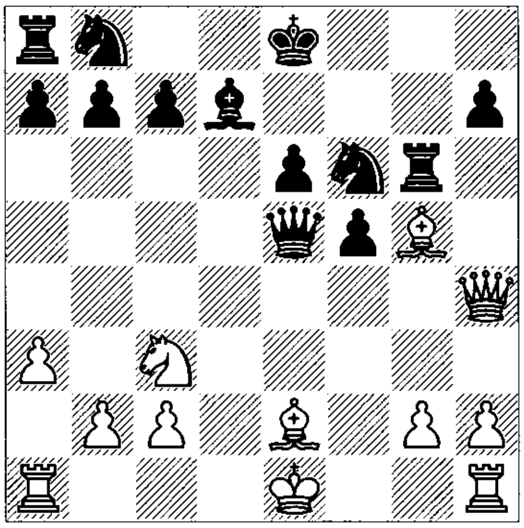
10 ♕xg7 ♕e5+ 11 ♗e2 ♖g8 12 ♕h6 ♖g6

12...♖xg2 is refuted by Kasparov's line 13 ♗g5! (stronger than 13 ♗f4, as suggested by

commentators at the time) 13...♘bd7 14 0-0-0, when the black pieces lack any kind of coordination.

13 ♕h4 ♗d7 14 ♗g5! *(D)*

B



14...♗c6?

Nimzowitsch cracks under the pressure. A lengthy analysis by Kasparov shows that by 14...♘c6! Black could escape with a draw. This allows Black to evacuate his king from the danger zone. Kasparov's main line goes 15 0-0-0 0-0-0 16 ♗h5 (16 ♖he1!?) 16...♘xh5!? 17 ♗xd8 f4 18 ♗e7 ♕f5 19 ♖d2 ♖g4 20 ♕f2 ♘xe7 21 ♕xa7 ♘c6 22 ♕a8+ ♘b8 23 ♖xd7 ♔xd7 24 ♕xb8 ♖xg2 25 ♖d1+ ♔c6 26 ♕e8+ ♔b6 27 ♕a4 ♘f6 28 ♕b4+ ♔a6 29 ♕c4+ ♔b6 with a draw by repetition. Consequently, Alekhine's double pawn sacrifice was objectively sufficient only for dynamic equality, but in the heat of the battle it proved impossible for his opponent to cope with the pressure. This pattern, which was later also typical in games by Tal, can be found again and again in Alekhine's games. These great attacking wizards possessed the unique ability to keep the pressure on until the opponent cracked. They kept finding new resources and twists to keep the fire burning.

15 0-0-0 ♗xg2

Now it is too late for Black to evacuate the king: 15...♘bd7 16 ♖he1 0-0-0 (16...♗e4 17 ♗h5 ♘xh5 18 ♕xh5 ♘f6 19 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 20 ♘xe4 fxe4 21 ♕b5+ and White wins) 17 ♗h5 ♖xg5 18 ♖xe5 ♖xh5 19 ♕d4, and wins (Kasparov).

16 ♖he1

All White's pieces are involved in the onslaught, and following Tal's Attacking Ratio (attacking pieces compared to defending pieces), Black is unlikely to survive. The end is swift.

16...♗e4 17 ♗h5 ♘xh5 18 ♖d8+ ♔f7 19 ♕xh5 1-0

The threat is 20 ♘xe4 fxe4 21 ♕xh7+ ♖g7 22 ♖f1+, and there is no adequate defence against this threat; e.g., 19...♔g7 20 ♘xe4 fxe4 21 ♗h6+! ♔f6 (21...♖xh6 22 ♕xe5+) 22 ♖f1+, winning the queen.

Alekhine won many such dynamic gems, and these games rightly gave him his place in chess history as one of the greatest attackers ever. However, as discussed above, the French-Russian was also capable of playing in a variety of other styles. Here are some examples of games that might just as easily have been played by one of the main representatives of the Scientific School; e.g., Capablanca, Rubinstein or Schlechter.

Alekhine – Chajes
Karlsbad 1923

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 ♘bd7 5 ♗g5 ♗e7 6 e3 0-0 7 ♖c1 c6

This was the main line in those days, and the line was, for instance, tested extensively in the Capablanca-Alekhine match. Anyone interested in the subtleties of the Queen's Gambit Declined should study those games; they constitute great learning material! 7...a6 is the main alternative.

8 ♕c2 a6 9 a3 ♖e8

In a well-known game against Grünfeld from the same tournament, Alekhine as Black interpolated 9...h6 10 ♗h4 before 10...♖e8.

10 h3 b5!?

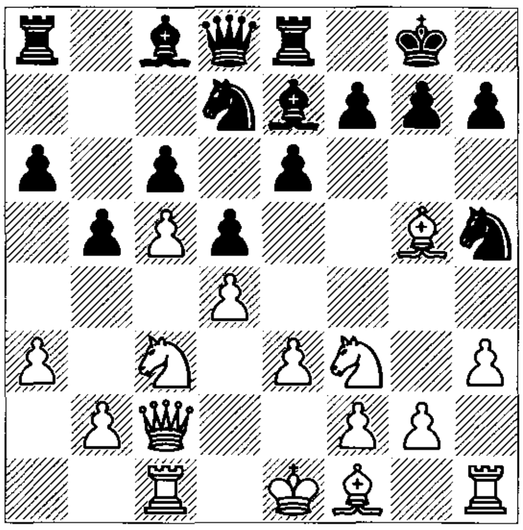
A rare but not bad approach to the position. Against the master of combination, Chajes prefers a closed position. The usual continuations both start with 10...dxc4 11 ♗xc4, and now either 11...b5 followed by ...♗b7 and ...c5 or Capablanca's 11...♘d5 12 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 followed by ...♘xc3 and ...e5. In each case White only maintains a minor pull.

11 c5 ♘h5 *(D)*

12 ♗f4!

Alekhine's patent. He is not afraid of giving up one of his two bishops, and willingly accepts a doubled pawn. The main point is to restrain Black's freeing ...e5, which he would be able to carry out after 12 ♗xe7 ♕xe7. In another game

W



from the same Karlsbad tournament, Alekhine employed the same idea in an even more cunning way. His game against Rubinstein went 9 a4 (rather than 9 a3 from the present game) 9...♖e8 10 ♗d3 dxc4 11 ♗xc4 ♘d5 12 ♗f4!? ♘xf4 13 exf4 c5 14 dxc5 ♕c7 15 0-0! ♕xf4 16 ♘e4! ♘xc5 17 ♘xc5 ♗xc5 18 ♗d3 b6 19 ♗xh7+ ♔h8? (19...♔f8 is better – Alekhine) 20 ♗e4, with some advantage for White, who went on to win. Later the idea of accepting separated pawns on d4 and f4 in this way was successfully adopted by Botvinnik, and in our times, Gelfand has used this concept to good effect. There is no expiration date on profound chess ideas!

12...♘xf4 13 exf4 a5 14 ♗d3 g6 15 h4! ♗f6

Black cannot block the kingside with 15...h5 because of 16 ♗xg6.

16 h5 ♘f8 17 g3 ♖a7 18 ♘d1!

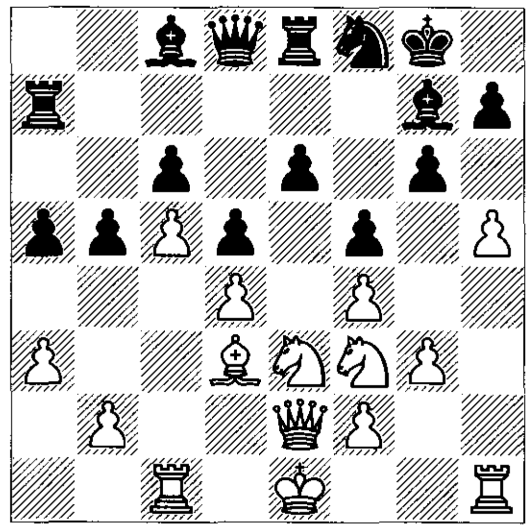
Alekhine manoeuvres skilfully. The knight is aiming for the g4-square, from which it controls e5, f6 and h6.

18...♗g7 19 ♘e3 f5!?

A difficult decision. Black goes on the defensive and prevents the intended knight manoeuvre to g4, but at the same time chronically weakens e5 and abandons any hopes for initiating a freeing central break.

20 ♕e2 *(D)*

B



20...a4?

A fatal strategic mistake which I am sure no modern grandmaster would commit. As I have mentioned before, one of the greatest leaps forward in chess thinking over the past century has occurred in the field of defensive skill. Before this move Black was worse but solid – now he is just strategically lost. The advance is flawed for two reasons. First, it opens an alternative route for White's knight, which will now hurry to occupy the blockading square b4, from where it hits c6 and may quickly be reemployed to e5 via d3. And second – perhaps most importantly – Black abandons any hopes for disturbing White by opening files and diagonals on the queenside (e.g., with ...b5 followed by ...♗a6), thereby leaving White a completely free hand to carry out his plans on the kingside.

21 ♘c2! ♖ae7 22 ♔f1 ♗f6 23 ♘e5 ♗xe5 24 ♕xe5 ♕c7 25 ♕f6 ♖f7 26 ♕h4 ♕e7?!

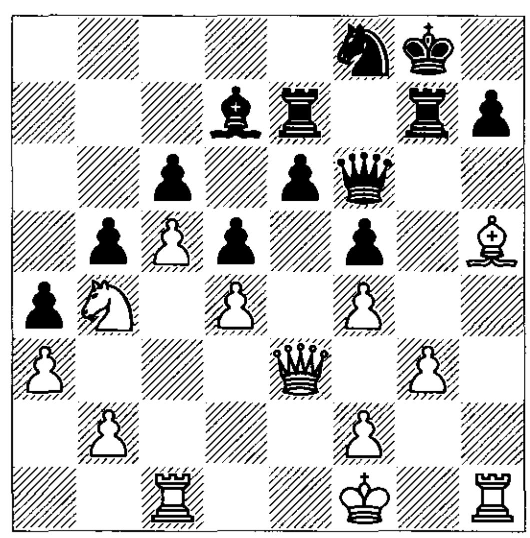
A further inaccuracy. By 26...♖g7 Black could keep open the possibility of taking back on g6 with a pawn.

27 hxg6! ♘xg6 28 ♕h5

Now the h7-pawn is chronically weak.

28...♕f6 29 ♗e2 ♖g7 30 ♕f3 ♘f8 31 ♕e3 ♖ee7 32 ♘b4 ♗d7 33 ♗h5 *(D)*

B



A picturesque position. Black is strategically lost, but the win is not trivial. Alekhine explains how systematically he went about converting his advantage: "This move leads to a curious position in which Black's queen, both rooks and bishop are immobilized. The problem of winning still needs to be solved, for at present the doubling and even the trebling of the white pieces on the h-file would lead to nothing. The

rather complicated plan which White will strive to pursue, which must, of course, be modified in accordance with Black's manoeuvres, can be summarized as follows:

"*1st phase* – Bringing the king to the centre where, after the later exchange of queens and rooks on the h-file, it will threaten a rapid penetration of the hostile camp via a5 *[another problem created by Black's unfortunate 20...a4? – LBH]*. These tactics will logically induce a corresponding displacement of the black king, the more plausible since its presence in the centre will consolidate the weak points c6 and e6.

"*2nd phase* – Compelling Black's pieces to remove themselves in succession from the kingside by tactical threats aimed either at the king himself or at the enemy pawns (39th and 41st moves). The prospect of the occupation of the square e5 by a white knight, thereby immobilizing the black knight at d7, increases still more the difficulty of concerted action by the black pieces, which is already difficult enough on account of the limited space available to them.

"*3rd phase* – Finally, at an appropriate moment, namely, when Black's pieces are at their greatest distance from the kingside, doubling rooks on the h-file. The rooks, after the forced exchange of queens and bishops, will penetrate into the heart of the hostile position.

"As we shall see by the sequel, the methodical implementation of this strategic plan requires no fewer than 28 moves!"

A strategist talking, not a tactician! Alekhine was able to shift effortlessly between the various roles when needed.

33...♘g6 34 ♘d3 ♗e8 35 ♔e2! ♔f8 36 ♔d2 ♖b7 37 ♗f3 ♔e7 38 ♖he1 ♘f8 39 ♘b4!

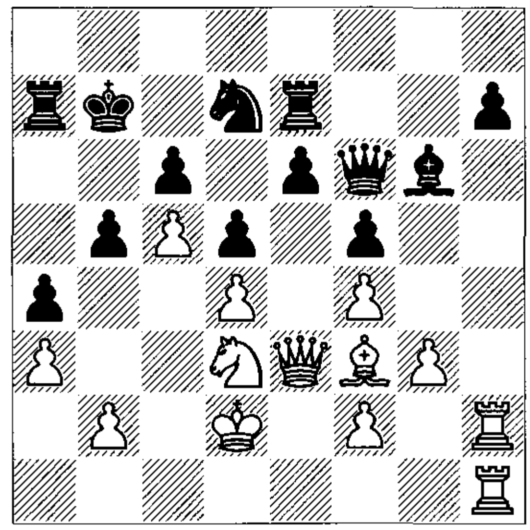
One of the aforementioned tactical shots is in the air: White threatens 40 ♗xd5! cxd5 41 ♘xd5+.

39...♔d8 40 ♔d3 ♖ge7 41 ♕d2!

And now he hints at penetrating via a5 with the queen.

41...♖a7 42 ♖h1 ♖ec7 43 ♖h2 ♗g6 44 ♕e3 ♔c8 45 ♖ch1 ♔b7 46 ♔d2 ♖e7 47 ♘d3 ♘d7 *(D)*

W



48 ♗h5!

Parts 1 and 2 of the strategic plan have been executed, and Alekhine turns to part 3 – by allowing the exchange of Black's hitherto passive bishop, White ensures the penetration of his rooks along the h-file.

48...♖a8 49 ♗xg6 hxg6 50 ♖h7 ♖ae8 51 ♘e5! ♘f8

51...♘xe5 52 fxe5 ♕f8 53 ♕g5 (Kotov) drops the g6-pawn.

52 ♖h8 ♖g7 53 ♘f3!

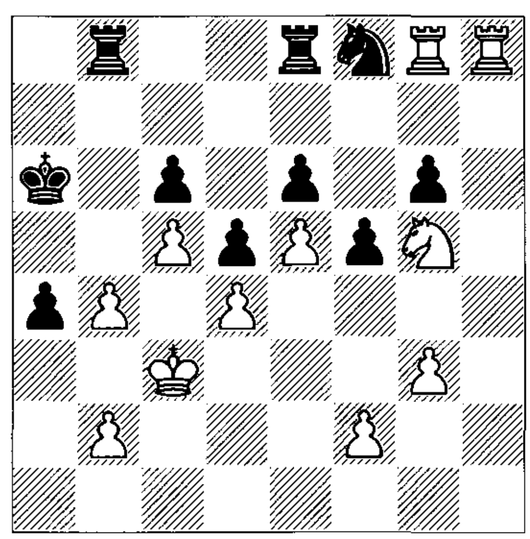
Black has survived the initial onslaught, but now White rearranges the knight to hit e6 instead.

53...♖b8 54 ♘g5 ♖e7 55 ♕e5! ♕xe5 56 fxe5 ♔a8 57 ♖g8 b4?!

A desperate attempt that just hastens the end.

58 ♖hh8 ♖ee8 59 axb4 ♔a7 60 ♔c3 ♔a6 *(D)*

W



61 ♘f7!

28 moves have passed and White's strategic plan has been successfully executed. Alekhine now decides the game by a direct mating attack on Black's king. Such tactical opportunities he never missed.

61...♖a8 62 ♘d6 ♖eb8 63 ♖h1!

The point – there is no adequate defence against 64 ♖a1 and mate.

63...♘d7 64 ♖a1 1-0

A masterful strategic performance!

Alekhine – Eliskases
Buenos Aires Olympiad 1939

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4

The Panov Attack is thought one of White's most aggressive continuations against the solid Caro-Kann Defence. However, Alekhine doesn't win this game through aggression but rather patient manoeuvring!

4...♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♘f3 ♗e7 7 cxd5 ♘xd5 8 ♗b5+!?

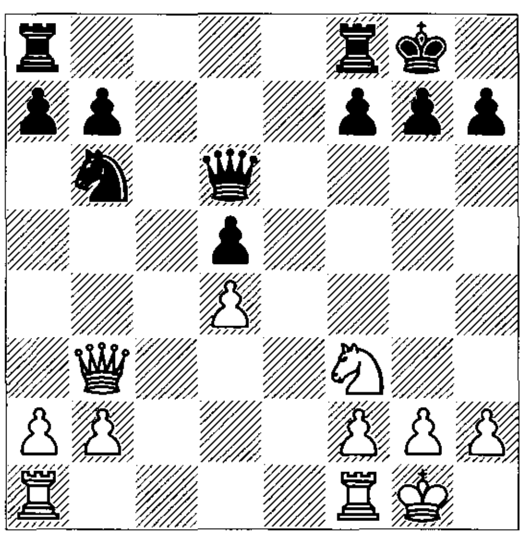
A comparatively rare line that doesn't offer White more than a small pull. Nowadays 8 ♗d3 and 8 ♗c4 are the main lines.

8...♗d7 9 ♗xd7+ ♘xd7

Alekhine preferred 9...♕xd7 10 ♘e5 ♘xc3! 11 bxc3 ♕b5 12 c4 ♕a5+ 13 ♗d2 ♗b4, but I guess that is mainly a matter of taste – in each case White maintains a tiny edge, but no more.

10 ♘xd5 exd5 11 ♕b3 ♘b6 12 0-0 0-0 13 ♗f4 ♗d6 14 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 *(D)*

W



The pawn-structure is symmetrical and both sides have completed development – why is White (slightly) better here? Mainly because of the difference in relation to queens and knights. White's queen is optimally placed on b3, from where it eyes d5 and b7, while his knight is ready to occupy a nice central outpost on e5. In contrast, Black's queen is currently a passive guard on d6, while the knight is clumsily placed on b6. True, these are minor issues that may be corrected through a few defensive moves, and White needs to be very accurate to obtain anything significant out of this simple position. If you had not seen the names of the players you might guess that White was Capablanca or Karpov – but it is Alekhine showing a lesser-known side of his game, that of the subtle strategist.

15 ♖fe1 ♖ac8 16 ♖ac1 h6?!

A small but instructive inaccuracy. Since Black would like to kick White's knight from e5 at some point, he should keep the h-pawn on h7 so as not to weaken g6 after ...f6.

17 ♘e5 ♖c7 18 g3 ♖fc8 19 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 20 ♕b5!

White eyes the e8-square.

20...♘d7

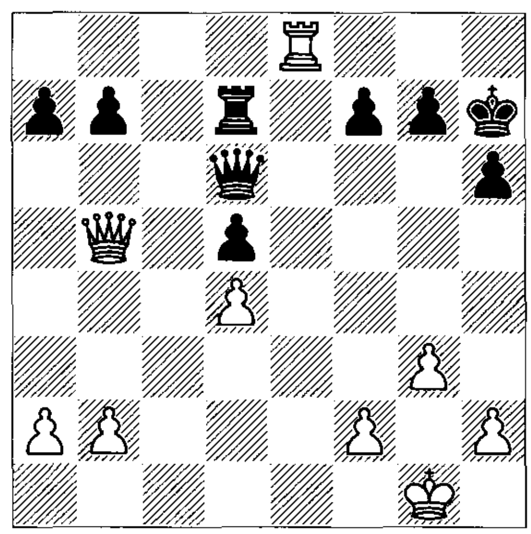
Kotov, who wrote extensively on Alekhine, criticizes this move, suggesting 20...♖e7 instead. However, in any case White maintains an edge, and Black's real mistake follows later in the game.

21 ♘xd7 ♖xd7

21...♕xd7 22 ♖e8+ ♔h7 23 ♕d3+ g6 24 ♕e3 amounts to very much the same thing – a nagging plus for White.

22 ♖e8+ ♔h7 *(D)*

W



23 h4!

A small but powerful move. Black would like to have a defensive set-up with f7-g6-h5, but this is not really possible since the desirable 23...h5 is met by 24 ♖a8! a6 25 ♕e2!, threatening 26 ♕e8 while hitting h5 in the process.

23...a6 24 ♕e2 ♖d8 25 ♖e7 ♖d7 26 ♖e5 g6 27 h5! ♕f6 28 ♕e3 ♖d6 29 ♕b3!?

The simple 29 hxg6+ ♕xg6 30 ♕f3 was also possible. Now play takes on a more forcing nature.

29...♖b6! 30 hxg6+ ♕xg6

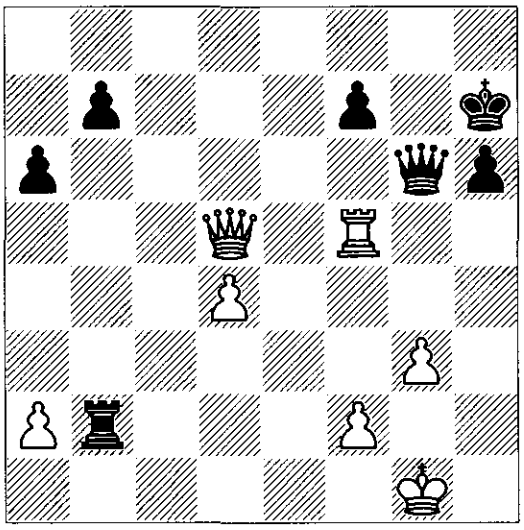
Forced, as 30...fxg6? 31 ♕xd5 ♖xb2? loses to 32 ♕d7+.

31 ♕xd5 ♖xb2 32 ♖f5 *(D)*

32...♖b5?

So far Eliskases has defended well and kept White's advantage within reasonable bounds, but now he cracks – as so many of Alekhine's

B



opponents did under his relentless pressure. After 32...♔g8 33 ♖f4 White maintains some advantage due to his safer king and passed d-pawn, but Black is still very much in the game.

33 ♖xf7+! ♔g8 34 ♖f6+!

Eliskases must have overlooked this check. White simplifies into a winning rook ending.

34...♖xd5 35 ♖xg6+ ♔h7 36 ♖b6 ♖xd4

Perhaps 36...♖d7 was a better chance, although White should slowly win after 37 ♔f1, calmly activating the king while his black counterpart is cut off.

37 ♖xb7+ ♔g8 38 ♖b6! ♖a4 39 ♖xh6 ♖xa2 40 ♔g2

This is now a technical win. The white king hides in front of the pawns.

40...a5 41 ♖a6 a4 42 ♖a7 a3 43 g4 ♔f8 44 g5 ♔g8 45 ♔g3 ♖a1 46 ♔g4! ♖g1+ 47 ♔f5 ♖g2 48 f4 a2 49 ♔f6 1-0

These two great games would have pleased the inventors of the Scientific School. However, Alekhine was not just capable of playing 'scientific chess'; he also possessed the skills to play in the style of the evolving Hypermodern School of Réti, Nimzowitsch and others. Just look at the following game where Hypermodern concepts like outposts, blockade and "pawn-chains must be attacked at the base" carry the day.

Kmoch – Alekhine

Semmering 1926

1 d4 f5!?

Alekhine in a fighting 'hypermodern' mood! The Dutch Defence, with its voluntary weakening of the king, could not be condoned by the Scientific School. However, Alekhine achieved a number of fine wins with this aggressive opening, such as the famous game against Bogoljubow in Hastings 1922.

2 ♕d3!?

A rare move with the idea of forcing Black into a Stonewall set-up, since 2...e6 or 2...g6 may be met by 3 e4.

2...d5 3 ♗f4 e6 4 ♘f3

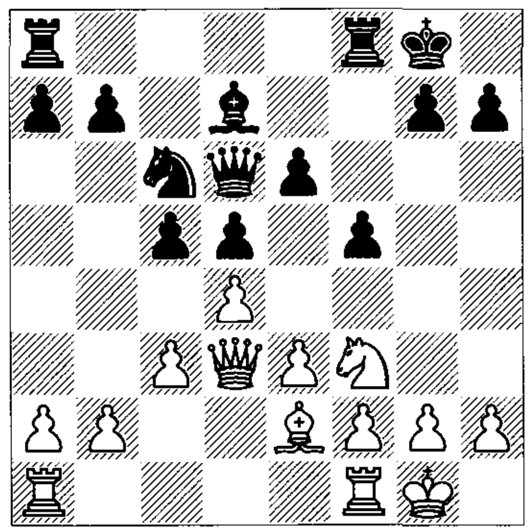
4 ♕g3!? is interesting.

4...♘f6 5 e3 ♗d6 6 ♗e2 0-0 7 ♘e5 c5!

This is the difference compared to a normal Stonewall. Black fights for control of the important e5-square.

8 c3 ♘c6! 9 ♘d2 ♕c7! 10 ♘df3 ♘d7! 11 ♘xd7 ♗xd7 12 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 13 0-0 *(D)*

B



13...c4!

The spirit of Nimzowitsch! The great chess thinker brought Philidor's old concept of pawn-chains back into the limelight in his games and writings, and Alekhine follows suit. Another possibility was 13...e5, which would probably be endorsed by the Scientific School – play in the centre – but in accordance with Nimzowitsch's hypermodern teachings, Alekhine transfers the target to c3, the new base of White's pawn-chain.

14 ♕d2 b5! 15 ♘e1 g5!

Attentive play. White intended f4 to fortify the centre, and Alekhine makes sure that this is only possible in return for handing Black a significant space advantage.

16 f4 g4!

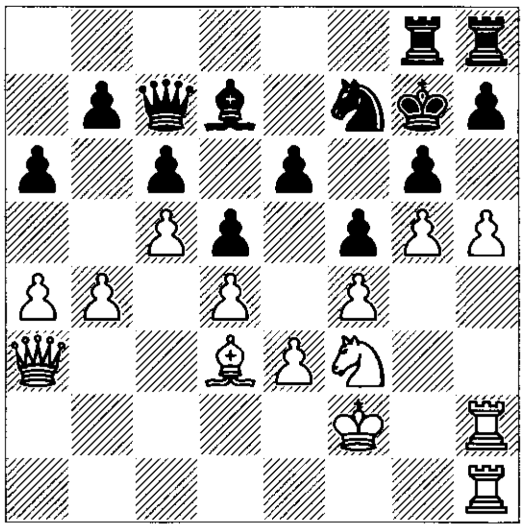
Now White's knight is prohibited from reaching e5, while Black's may look forward to a nice outpost on e4.

17 b3

With this and the 19th move, White merely aids Black in his attempts to open the b-file and fix c3 as a target. Perhaps White should simply

stay put with 17 ♘c2 and 18 a3, waiting for Black to prepare ...b4, although this too is highly unpleasant. Interestingly, the position would then resemble a later game by Alekhine's arch-rival, Capablanca:

W



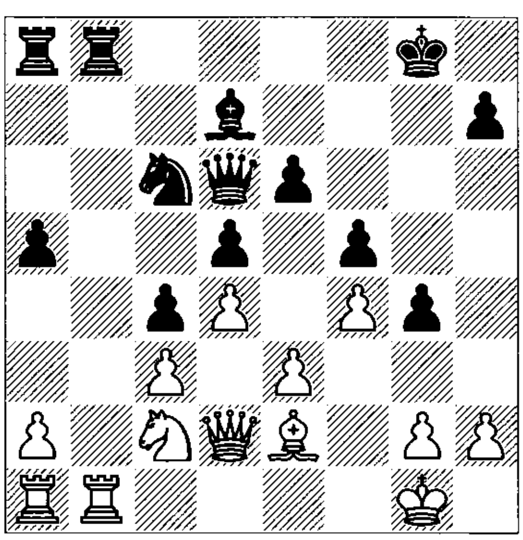
Capablanca – Treybal
Karlsbad 1929

With skilful manoeuvres the great Cuban eventually overcame Black's resistance: 36 b5! axb5 37 h6+ ♔f8 38 axb5 ♔e7 39 b6! ♕b8 40 ♖a1 ♖c8 41 ♕b4 ♖hd8 42 ♖a7 ♔f8 43 ♖h1 ♗e8 44 ♖ha1 ♔g8 45 ♖1a4 ♔f8 46 ♕a3 ♔g8 47 ♔g3 ♗d7 48 ♔h4 ♔h8 49 ♕a1 ♔g8 50 ♔g3 ♔f8 51 ♔g2 ♗e8 52 ♘d2! ♗d7 53 ♘b3 ♖e8 54 ♘a5 ♘d8 55 ♗a6! bxa6 56 ♖xd7 ♖e7 57 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 58 ♘xc6 1-0.

We return to Kmoch-Alekhine:

17...♖fb8 18 ♘c2 a5 19 bxc4 bxc4 20 ♖fb1 *(D)*

B



20...♘a7!

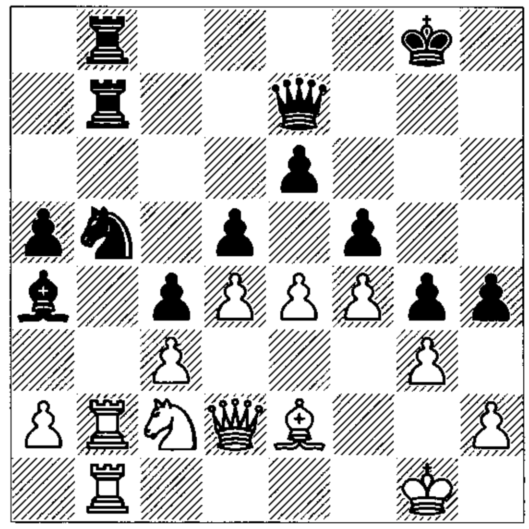
As Nimzowitsch prescribed: pawn-chains must be attacked at the base! The knight aims for b5, hitting c3.

21 ♕e1 ♗a4 22 ♗d1 ♕e7 23 ♕d2 ♘b5 24 ♖b2 ♖b7 25 ♖ab1 ♖ab8 26 ♗e2 h5 27 g3?!

As on moves 17 and 19, White is obliging. The text-move hands Black an additional target. Probably Kmoch tried to induce Black to push ...h4 because he had then prepared a small surprise...

27...h4! 28 e4!? *(D)*

B



This is it – if Black takes with the d-pawn, c4 hangs; if he takes with the f-pawn, g4 hangs. However, Alekhine has seen further...

28...♘d6!

A simple refutation. Black's knight finally reaches its dream outpost on e4, hitting c3 and g3 simultaneously.

29 ♖xb7 ♖xb7 30 ♖xb7 ♕xb7 31 ♕c1

Tantamount to resignation, but after 31 exd5 Black interpolates 31...♕b2!; for example, 32 ♗d1 ♘e4 33 ♕e2 exd5 34 ♘e3 ♕c1, and Black wins.

31...♘xe4 32 ♘e3 hxg3 33 hxg3 ♘xg3 34 ♔f2 ♘e4+ 0-1

Alekhine's affiliation with the Hypermodern School is also visible from the fact that he invented an opening which builds upon the ideas of this school – the tenet that you do not have to occupy the centre with pawns (as the Scientific School prescribed); it can also be controlled by piece-pressure from a distance.

Thomas – Alekhine
Baden-Baden 1925

1 e4 ♘f6!?

The Alekhine Defence, which was non-standard at the time. Black allows his knight to be pushed around the board, letting White occupy

the centre with pawns with tempo – and yet Black has sufficient counterplay!

2 d3

Alekhine's opponents initially had some difficulty finding out how to handle this new opening. The principled move is undoubtedly 2 e5, whereas the game now transposes to a Closed Sicilian. Another example of an insipid white response to Alekhine's Defence from the same tournament is 2 ♘c3 d5 3 e5 ♘fd7 4 ♘xd5 ♘xe5 5 ♘e3 ♘bc6 6 ♘f3 ♘xf3+ 7 ♕xf3 ♕d6! 8 ♗b5 ♗d7 9 0-0 e6 10 c3 ♕e5 11 a4 ♗d6 12 g3 ♕f6!? 13 ♕xf6 gxf6 14 d4 ♘a5 15 ♗xd7+ ♔xd7 16 b4 ♘c6 17 ♖d1 a6 18 ♖b1 b5! 19 a5 ♘e7 20 ♖b2 ♔c6 21 ♔f1 ♘d5 22 ♔e1 h5 23 ♘g2 ♖ae8 24 ♗e3 f5 25 ♔d2 h4! 26 ♔d3 hxg3 27 hxg3 ♖h2, and Black was clearly better and went on to win in Mieses-Alekhine, Baden-Baden 1925.

2...c5 3 f4 ♘c6 4 ♘f3 g6 5 ♗e2?!

Very passive. In the Closed Sicilian the light-squared bishop belongs on g2.

5...♗g7 6 ♘bd2 d5!

Alekhine now returns to classical play – conquer the centre!

7 0-0 0-0 8 ♔h1 b6 9 exd5 ♕xd5 10 ♕e1 ♗b7 11 ♘c4 ♘d4

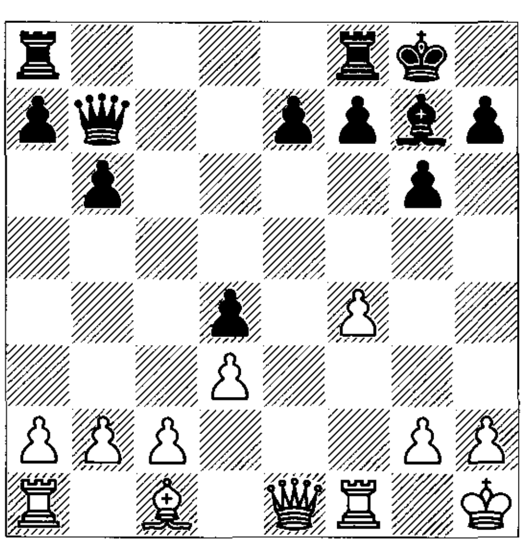
A nice outpost for the knight.

12 ♘e3 ♕c6 13 ♗d1 ♘d5!

A pawn sacrifice, but one that White can hardly accept: 14 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 15 ♕xe7 ♖fe8 16 ♕g5 (16 ♕h4 ♘e2! followed by 17...♘xc1 and 18...♗xb2) 16...♘xf3 17 ♗xf3 (17 gxf3 or 17 ♕xd5 ♗xd5 18 gxf3 leaves both white bishops buried) 17...♕xg5 18 fxg5 ♗xf3 19 gxf3 ♖e2, with a clear advantage for Black (Kotov).

14 ♘xd4 cxd4 15 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 16 ♗f3 ♕d7 17 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 *(D)*

W



18 c4?!

Otherwise this backward pawn constitutes a clear target for Black, but the text-move doesn't solve that problem – the pawn (and now its neighbour on d3 too) is still weak. Perhaps it was a better chance to open squares for the bishop by 18 f5!?.

18...dxc3 19 bxc3 ♖ac8 20 ♗b2 ♖fd8 21 ♖f3 ♗f6!

A good *prophylactic* move that covers e7 and prevents White's ♖h3 + ♕h4 set-up.

22 d4?

"Tantamount to positional capitulation!", Kotov exclaims. Black now *blockades* the light squares and slowly increases his advantage to decisive proportions.

22...♕d5 23 ♕e3 ♕b5 24 ♕d2 ♖d5 25 h3 e6! 26 ♖e1 ♕a4 27 ♖a1 b5!

All pawns and pieces on light squares!

28 ♕d1 ♖c4 29 ♕b3 ♖d6! 30 ♔h2 ♖a6! 31 ♖ff1 ♗e7 32 ♔h1 ♖cc6 33 ♖fe1 ♗h4 34 ♖f1 ♕c4 35 ♕xc4

White had fought to avoid this exchange, but in view of Black's threat of 35...♖a4 and 36...♖ca6, winning the a2-pawn, it could no longer be avoided.

35...♖xc4 36 a3 ♗e7 37 ♖fb1 ♗d6!

As we shall see in the course of the game, it is vital to force White's g-pawn onto a dark square on which it can be attacked by Black's bishop.

38 g3 ♔f8!

Alekhine patiently improves his position. Now the king is activated.

39 ♔g2 ♔e7 40 ♔f2 ♔d7 41 ♔e2 ♔c6 42 ♖a2 ♖ca4 43 ♖ba1 ♔d5 44 ♔d3 ♖6a5 45 ♗c1 a6 46 ♗b2 h5!

Toying with 47...h4, thus forcing another white pawn onto a dark square.

47 h4 *(D)*

47...f6!

White has been thoroughly outplayed, but to win Black needs another weakness. This weakness is g3 (that's why 37...♗d6 was so strong!), and the opening of the centre by ...e5 enables Black to target it.

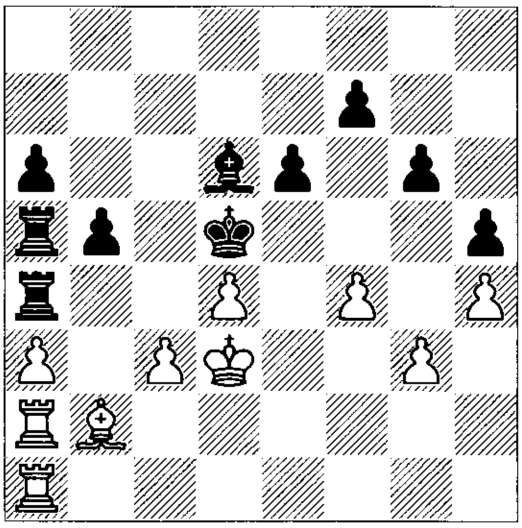
48 ♗c1 e5!

The white position collapses.

49 fxe5 fxe5 50 ♗b2 exd4 51 cxd4 b4!

Finally Black's positional advantage is turned into a material advantage.

B



52 axb4?!

A blunder in a lost position.

52...♖xa2 53 bxa5 ♖xb2 0-1

Every aspiring chess-player should study the games of Alexander Alekhine. In my early years, I was mainly a 'static player' with a keen focus on the long-term factors of the game – as prescribed by the Scientific School. For example, I was very reluctant to accept an isolated d-pawn. It was when I studied Kotov's volumes on Alekhine that I first started getting a more refined understanding of the dynamic elements of the game. Alekhine was a hard worker on chess, and as such he paved the way for the final advance of the Scientific School – bringing science into chess preparation. Alekhine laid the foundation in this field, but it was his successor on the throne – Mikhail Botvinnik – who was to perfect the art of chess preparation. Let's take a look at that.

Botvinnik: Bringing Science into Chess Preparation

Apart from 'a scientific approach' to the evaluation of the activities *on* the board, in the first half of the 20th century the chess world also witnessed a scientific revolution *off* the board – concerning the way ambitious chess-players work on improving their game. This revolution started in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when World Champions like Alekhine, Euwe and especially Botvinnik introduced a systematic approach to chess preparation. While acknowledging the importance of other masters in this process, undoubtedly the main credit for this progress should be given to Botvinnik. Let us therefore delve a little into Botvinnik's system of chess preparation.

Some people like to talk about the Soviet School of Chess. As I already mentioned in my earlier book *Foundations of Chess Strategy*, I do not really believe that such a school exists or existed when it comes to aligning the *play* of the Soviet players. They differ and differed significantly in style – just compare players like Botvinnik (systematic) to Smyslov (harmony), Bronstein (creativity) or Tal (chaos). No common pattern there! However, I do believe that there is a Soviet School of *training* and *preparation*, 'founded' and epitomized by Botvinnik, and the traces of which are visible to this day in the methods of trainers from the former Soviet Union. Botvinnik seems to be of the same opinion. He once wrote that "in the time from 1940 to 1960 Soviet chess experienced a qualitative leap forward, which to a certain extent (so it seems to me) was connected to the system of preparation." Captured in a few words, the Soviet School of chess training and preparation is about being *thorough* and *systematic*. Young players have to learn the lessons from chess history: the principles of opening play, standard patterns of middlegames, and all the theoretical positions from the endgame. In an interview from 1978, Botvinnik explained that "the propensity of the Soviet School of chess training for a scientific approach allows young talents to quickly master the game". Or in other words, once the foundation has been built in a player by passing on centuries of chess knowledge through a comprehensive training program, he is ready to conquer the chess world.

Such a systematic approach makes sense – after all, chess is a knowledge game in which knowledge accumulates from one generation to the next. The game has all the characteristics needed for scientific rigour. Given that chess games and analysis can easily be stored and accessed, there is no need to repeat the mistakes of the previous generations – we might as well leapfrog the learning process by drawing on their experiences and learn from their successes and failures. From experience I know that players educated in the Soviet School rarely commit large positional mistakes; they have clearly internalized the lessons of the old masters.

One other feature of the Soviet School is the diligent analysis of one's own games. All games played must be submitted to rigorous scrutiny at home in order to understand exactly what went well or wrong. Then these analyses are discussed in groups of players or with the trainer. When you know you have to present your conclusions in front of the trainer or a group of players, you are certainly motivated to do your best in analysis! I believe there is much to be gained from this process. Often I see players paying significant sums for visiting coaches and going over games they have played, but without doing any work on their own between these sessions. That way significant learning potential is lost. It is much better to work independently on the games beforehand; analysing and looking up games played by grandmasters in the opening variation at hand. Then the coach can help by pointing out patterns, correcting mistakes, or suggesting material for further study. I realize that for many readers it is a simple question of time. Analysing takes time, and in busy everyday life, time is a scarce resource. However, if you are serious about your chess, I strongly advise you to find a few hours here and there for analysing your own games. The benefits will quickly show in your results.

Botvinnik himself went even further. He adhered to the principle of publishing all his game analysis, so that other chess-players could scrutinize them and come up with other suggestions or point out flaws. In that way Botvinnik hoped that he would continuously learn more – through that method he had the whole chess world as his second! Such a systematic and scientific approach enabled Botvinnik to outperform his peers, and it is perhaps not surprising that Botvinnik was the 'king of rematches', defeating Smyslov in 1958 and Tal in 1961 to reclaim his World Championship title.

The Soviet School of training has been enormously powerful and successful. Just consider the list of classical World Champions since World War II: Botvinnik, Smyslov, Tal, Petrosian, Spassky, Fischer, Karpov, Kasparov, Kramnik and Anand. Only Fischer and Anand were not 'educated' in the Soviet School. Or if we include the FIDE World Champions that emerged since Kasparov and Short broke away from FIDE in 1993: Karpov, Khalifman, Anand, Ponomariov, Kasimdzhanov and Topalov. Again only two players – Anand and Topalov – were not trained in the (former) Soviet School. Seen in this light it is perhaps not surprising that players and coaches educated in the Botvinnik style have great faith in their system – perhaps sometimes too much faith. In a recent article in *Time Magazine*, Vishy Anand tells the story of how, at the tournament in Reggio Emilia 1991, a leading Soviet grandmaster told him that he could "be no more than a coffee-house player because he had not been tutored in the Soviet School of Chess". The talented Indian kept quiet, but thought to himself that there was no reason the Soviets should be able to claim some kind of monopoly on chess – after all, chess originated in India, not the Soviet Union, so why couldn't there be an Indian way to reach the top? I can relate to Anand's story; on a few occasions I too, especially in the beginning of my career, before the fall of the Iron Curtain, encountered the same somewhat arrogant attitude from Soviets – sometimes implicitly and occasionally explicitly as in Anand's case. What always surprised me in those instances was not the Soviets' blind faith in their system – I, and I am sure Anand too, certainly acknowledge the virtues of the Soviet School – but the apparent belief that this was the *only* way of developing top players; that there was no other way.

Anand proved that you don't need to go through the Soviet School to become World Champion and the world's number one, and we have other young talents on the rise that prove the same point, most notably Norway's Magnus Carlsen. India is now a chess super-power on the rise; in addition to Anand, India has a number of other very strong and talented grandmasters (e.g., Sashikiran and Harikrishna), the second highest rated woman in the world after Judit Polgar (Humpy Koneru), several promising teenage talents (e.g., Parimarjan Negi), and recently won both the 2008 Open (Abhijeet Gupta) and Girls (Harika Dronavalli) Junior World Championships. It is also interesting to follow the progress of Chinese chess; China has already had a dominant position in women's chess for over a decade, and with a handful of players around 2700 (e.g., Bu Xiangzhi, Ni Hua, Wang Yue, Wang Hao) we shall probably soon see a Chinese player in the absolute world

elite. These observations open up a highly interesting question: is the Soviet system being challenged as the dominant paradigm for how to develop young talents into top players?

There are some tendencies in chess as well as in the wider society that may indeed present a challenge to the very structured, generic and systematic Soviet training approach. First, as we shall discuss in further detail in Chapter 6, chess has evolved from a 'rule-based' game – which the Soviet School does such a good job teaching the young talents – and into a more concrete and creative game. I call the current era 'Creative Concreteness'. While I still believe in the need for knowing all the principles of chess developed by past generations, chess today is much more about knowing when to *break* the rules than how to *adhere* to the rules. You cannot win games at top level these days simply by following the rules by Steinitz, Capablanca or Nimzowitsch. To be able to break the rules you must know the rules, but contemporary coaches should be careful not to rush to criticism if a young talent plays a move 'outside the rules'. Allow the talent the chance to explain why he thinks that the concrete position merits a 'rule-breaking' move. It may very well be that the present position is an exception to the rule, and if not, the situation enables the coach and the talent to have a fruitful discussion about how to spot rule-breaking opportunities.

A small anecdote may illustrate the point. A few years ago a chess magazine described the strong play of a former Soviet grandmaster – raised in the Soviet School but now based in the West – in a particular tournament using the term 'kak machina': like a machine. The author intended it as a compliment, but the grandmaster was annoyed – he knew that he would not have been able to achieve such a good performance just by 'playing like a machine'. These days, it takes much more than that.

Second, in society a growing individualism is visible, and in chess training too an individualistic pedagogic approach is in my opinion best. As I argued in *Foundations of Chess Strategy*, chess-players differ in style – I identified four types of players: reflectors, theorists, pragmatics and activists – and different talents should be trained in different ways. While there are some things – a lot, in fact – that all young talents should study, they will not necessarily gain the same insights out of the same material. A talented positional player might learn more from a study of Karpov's games – because of an inherent feel for the subtle positional aspects – than a combinative talent. And conversely, the combinative talent may gain more than the positional talent from a study of Tal's ingenious attacks. When it comes to learning, there is no 'one-size-fits-all recipe'. As a coach, you must tailor your material to the particular talent of the players. Botvinnik himself was well aware of this principle. In *My Great Predecessors*, Kasparov explains how at a young age the Patriarch recognized Kasparov's extraordinary talent for dynamic positions and advised him to develop this unique talent further by thoroughly studying the King's Indian games of dynamic players such as Bronstein, Geller, Boleslavsky and Stein. From this study, the young Kasparov developed an affection for the King's Indian that was to follow him long into his career.

Botvinnik's importance for chess is hard to overestimate. In addition to his own results – World Champion three times and a total of 13 years – he introduced scientific rigour into chess, and he worked hard to pass on his knowledge to later generations through his famous Botvinnik School (later the Botvinnik-Kasparov School), into which only the brightest young talents of Soviet chess were admitted. The old master showed a remarkable talent for identifying these talents; he predicted the future successes of Karpov, Kasparov and Kramnik when they were still young children. For example, in the aforementioned interview from early 1978, Botvinnik predicted a bright future for a 14-year-old youngster named Garry Kasparov...

The scientific era revolutionized chess in more ways than one, but with each thesis eventually comes an antithesis. This antithesis was the Hypermodern Era, to which we now turn.

Change is the process by which the future invades our lives.
ALVIN TOFFLER

3 The Hypermodern Era

Follow the course opposite to custom and you will almost always do well.
JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

When asked about my favourite chess-player, I always answer that I do not have *one* favourite player – I try to learn from all the great players. However, one player has had a larger impact on my play than any other: Aron Nimzowitsch. The legendary master has a great place in the hearts of all Danish chess-players, since he lived his last 12 years in Denmark. To us, he is 'Denmark's Chess Teacher'. However, he was more than that; he was the chess teacher of the entire world. In 1985, 50 years after his death in 1935, a memorial tournament was held in Næstved, close to my home town, to commemorate Nimzowitsch. I was invited as commentator and at that tournament I met for the first time a number of chess giants in person, such as Mikhail Tal, Bent Larsen and Nigel Short as well as two of my present Gambit publishers, John Nunn and Murray Chandler. Larsen, Walter Browne and Rafael Vaganian tied for first.

Nimzowitsch, together with, amongst others, Richard Réti and Gyula Breyer, formed the 'Hypermodern School', which was opposed to, but also built upon, the Scientific School. Sadly, these three 'revolutionaries' all died (too) young; Breyer in 1921 at 28 years old, Réti in 1929 at 39, and Nimzowitsch himself in 1935 at 48. However, they managed to change chess forever. The Hypermodern School was given its name by Tartakower, who himself was inspired by this school. The origin of the school was a clash with the teachings of Steinitz and Tarrasch, which the Hypermoderns considered too dogmatic.

Especially concerning the centre, the Hypermoderns disagreed with their predecessors. They did acknowledge the value of the centre – a famous Nimzowitsch quote goes "your eye on the wings, your mind on the centre, that is the deepest meaning of positional play". However, while the classical players from the Scientific School emphasized the occupation of the centre by pawns, the Hypermoderns argued that the centre could also be controlled from afar, with pieces rather than pawns. Out of this line of reasoning emerged openings like the Nimzo-Indian (1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4), the Réti System (1 ♘f3 followed by g3, ♗g2, b3 and ♗b2, with or without c4), the Grünfeld, named after Ernst Grünfeld, another famous Hypermodern (1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5), and the Alekhine Defence (1 e4 ♘f6). All of these openings share the same trait that they do not attempt to fight for the centre with pawns but rather with pieces. However, the Hypermodern School was much more than just a dispute over the centre. From this origin evolved a whole new paradigm of chess strategy, a paradigm which is visible in top chess even today. The leaders of the Hypermodern School also fathered two books that I consider among the best chess books of all time – Nimzowitsch's *My System* from 1925, and Réti's *Masters of the Chessboard*, published posthumously in 1932 three years after the author's death. In my view these books are mandatory reading for any aspiring chess-player.

In *My System*, Nimzowitsch outlines an integrated framework for chess strategy. I read this book for the first time as a teenager, and several times since. I have been very inspired by Nimzowitsch throughout my career, and I shall try to elucidate his system mainly through games of my own (though not exclusively). Notice that I shall describe the elements of Nimzowitsch's system as they have been seen and interpreted in practice, not strictly as in Nimzowitsch's theoretical terms. A number of the elements have since the original formulation been interpreted more broadly and also more dynamically, as discussed by John Watson in his excellent book *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*. Nimzowitsch's first element – the centre – was already discussed in relation to the Scientific School. Here we start with one of his most famous notions, that of *blockade*.

Blockade

Perhaps the best-known element in Nimzowitsch's system is that of *blockade*. In fact, Nimzowitsch wrote a small booklet by that title in 1925, the same year *My System* appeared. The concept of blockade, as formulated by Nimzowitsch, has three steps: *first restrain, then blockade, and finally destroy!*

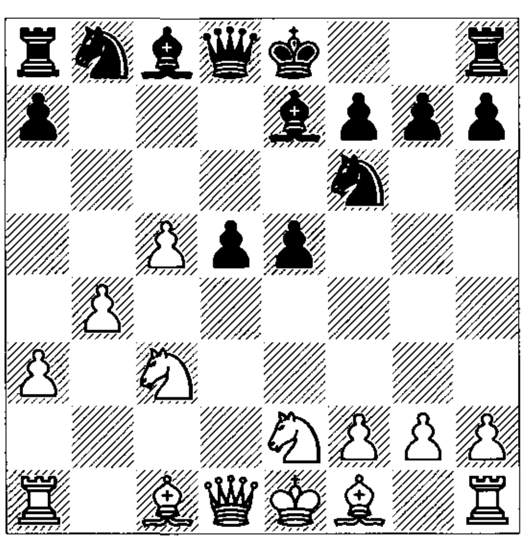
Nowadays a number of Nimzowitsch's elements are more broadly understood than at his time and blockade too has seen this development. The term is often used to refer more generally to closed pawn-structures, and this is how I have adopted the term in my practice, too.

Kristiansen – L.B. Hansen
Tåstrup 1990

1 d4 e6 2 c4 Nf6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e3

We have now reached a well-known position in the Nimzo-Indian Defence. 4 e3 is the Rubinstein Variation, first employed by the great Akiba in his game against Alekhine in St Petersburg 1914. That did not go well, but later Rubinstein scored many fine wins with this line. Probably the most famous one is Rubinstein-Maroczy, Hamburg Olympiad 1930. That game will have pleased the Hypermoderns: 4 e3 c5 5 Ne2 cxd4 6 exd4 d5 7 a3 Be7 8 c5 b6 9 b4 bxc5 10 dxc5 e5 *(D)*.

W



Apparently Black has conquered the centre, but now follows a strong flank attack on the pawn-centre in true hypermodern spirit! 11 f4! d4 (11...e4 allows the central pawns to be *blockaded* on the dark squares) 12 fxe5 dxc3 13 Qxd8+ Kxd8 14 exf6 Bxf6 15 Be3 Nc6? (Black should play 15...c2! 16 Rc1 Re8 17 Kd2 Bf5 18 Nd4 Rxe3! 19 Nxf5 {not 19 Kxe3? Bg5+} 19...Rxa3, with an unclear game) 16 0-0-0+ Kc7 17 Bf4+ Kb7 18 g3! Bf5 19 Bg2 Rae8 20 b5? (20 Nxc3! Bxc3 21 b5 gives White a large advantage) 20...Rxe2 21 Bxc6+ Kc8 22 Rd5! Be6? (a blunder which loses the game; instead, Black could draw with 22...Be4! 23 Rd7 Bxh1 24 Rxa7! Bxc6 25 bxc6 Be5 26 Ra8+ Kc7 27 Bxe5+ Rxe5 28 Rxh8 Rh5 29 h4 g5 30 hxg5 Rxg5 31 Rxh7 Rxg3 32 Rxf7+ Kxc6) 23 b6! axb6 24 cxb6 Rb2 25 Ra5 1-0.

4...c5 5 Nf3 d6 6 Bd3 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 Nc6 8 0-0 b6 9 e4 e5 10 h3 h6 11 Be3 Qc7 12 Qd2 Bd7 13 d5

A difficult decision. In principle Black is happy that the centre is closed as White loses dynamism, but on the other hand White gains space and can prepare the pawn-break f4. Botvinnik liked to take on e5 (or c5) in such positions followed by a knight manoeuvre to d5, but White is not really well positioned for that here. Chances are about even.

13...Ne7 14 Kh2 0-0-0 15 Ng1 g5!

Restraining White's intended f4 advance.

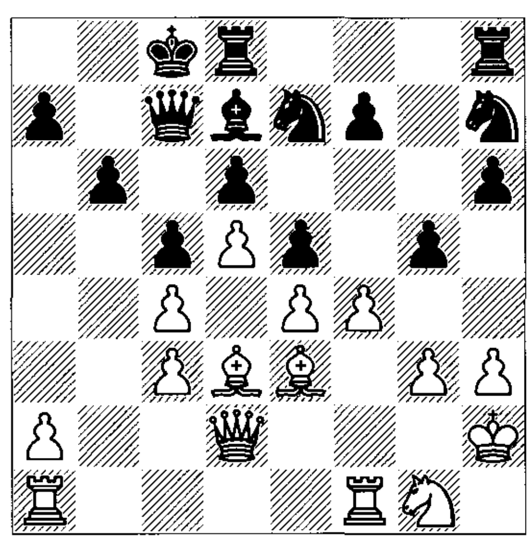
16 g3 Nh7

By toying with ...f5, Black induces f4.

17 f4?! *(D)*

Probably premature.

B



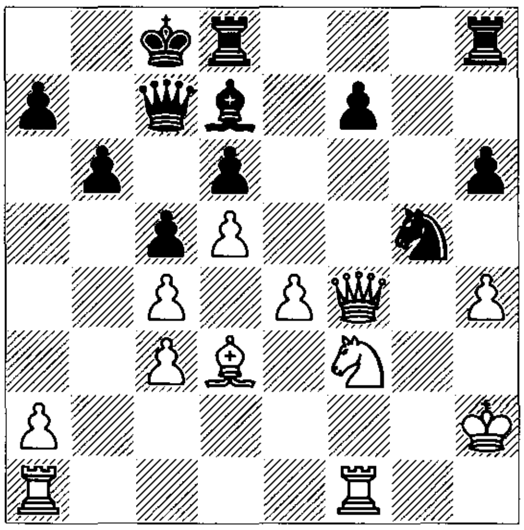
17...exf4! 18 gxf4 Ng6!

A powerful pawn sacrifice. 19 fxg5? hxg5 20 Bxg5?! Nxg5 21 Qxg5 Ne5 is disastrous for White with the open king's position and the *blockading* knight on e5.

19 Nf3 gxf4 20 Bxf4 Nxf4 21 Qxf4 Ng5! 22 h4 *(D)*

After 22 Nxg5? hxg5 the pawn on h3 falls.

B



22...f6!

Restraining the white e-pawn and vacating f7 for the knight, exploiting the fact that 23 hxg5? hxg5+ is check. If White had time to play e5 he would be fine, as all of his pieces would come to life. With the e-pawn stuck on e4, he is just worse, as his bishop is bad, his pawn-structure fractured and his king exposed.

23 ♕g3 ♘f7

The knight dreams of *blockading* on e5.

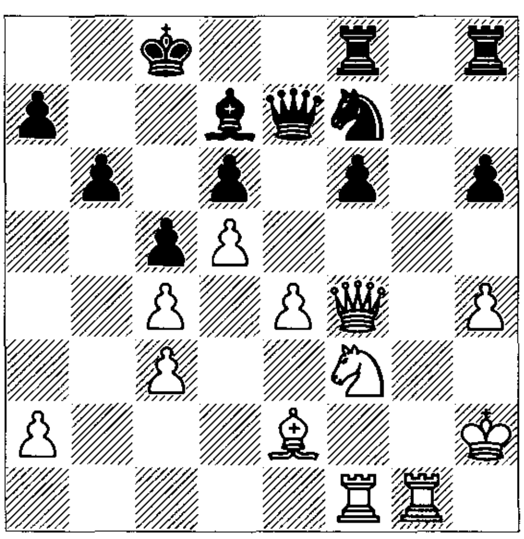
24 ♖g1 ♖df8 25 ♖af1 ♕d8

Black calmly improves the coordination of his pieces before taking possession of the e5-square. As Nimzowitsch used to say: "The threat is stronger than its execution!"

26 ♗e2 ♕e7 27 ♕f4?! *(D)*

This allows a tactical shot that wins material.

B



27...♘g5!

Again this trick! This time it is a double threat, 28...♘xe4 and 28...♘h3.

28 ♗d3 ♘h3 29 ♕g3 ♘xg1 30 ♖xg1 ♔c7 31 ♕f4 ♖fg8 32 ♖xg8 ♖xg8 33 ♕xh6 ♗g4!

The last defender of the key e5-square is kicked away. Black is winning.

34 ♕f4 ♗xf3 35 ♕xf3 ♕e5+ 36 ♔h3 ♕xc3 37 h5 ♕d2 38 e5!?

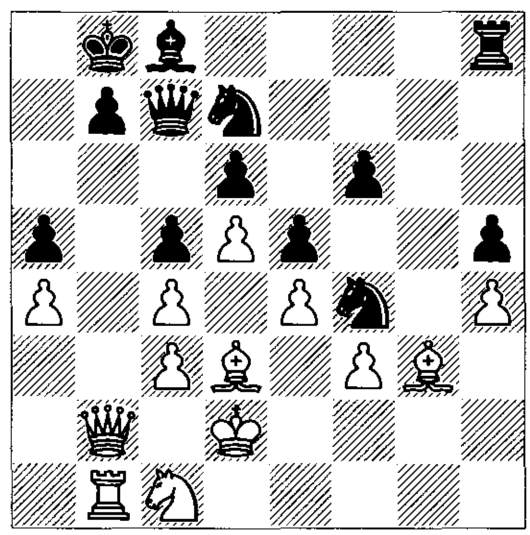
A spirited attempt in mutual time-trouble, but insufficient.

38...dxe5 39 d6+ ♔b8! 40 d7 ♔c7 41 ♗f5 e4! 0-1

42 ♗xe4 ♕xd7+ and 42 ♕xe4 ♕c3+ are both hopeless for White.

The problem for White in the type of position we have just seen is that it is difficult to maintain control. With more space, White should be better based on Scientific School standards, but this is one of the points where the Hypermodern School refined our understanding of chess strategy: *space is not necessarily crucial if the side with less space has all his pieces on good squares and dynamic possibilities.* I have won a number of games with such counterattacks from closed positions where White lost control. Let's take a brief snapshot.

W



Eriksson – L.B. Hansen
Copenhagen 2000

White should play 25 ♘e2, although I prefer Black. However, the Swedish IM is seduced by the prospect of winning a pawn:

25 ♗xf4? exf4 26 ♘e2 ♘e5!

This *blockading* square is certainly worth a pawn!

27 ♖f1

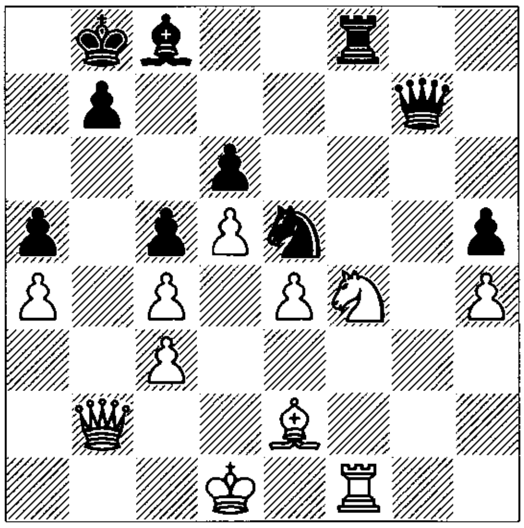
This is what White was banking on: the f4-pawn falls. However, the black counterattack is devastating as White's pieces lack coordination.

27...f5! 28 ♘xf4 ♕g7! 29 ♔d1 fxe4 30 fxe4 ♖f8 31 ♗e2 *(D)*

31...♗g4!

It is a bit sad to swap White's bad bishop, but as Tarrasch said: "What is important is not what

B



is exchanged but what remains on the board!" And what remains here is a decisive attack against White's exposed king.

32 ♕a2 ♘d3!

This cross-pin wins material.

33 ♕d2 ♘xf4 34 ♗xg4

Obviously hopeless, but 34 ♖xf4 ♗xe2+ 35 ♔xe2 ♕g2+ followed by 36...♕xd2+ and 37...♖xf4 is no better.

34...♕xg4+ 35 ♔c2 ♕xh4 36 e5 dxe5 37 d6 ♖d8 38 ♕e3 ♕f6 39 ♖d1 ♖xd6 40 ♖g1 ♕f5+ 0-1

The notion of blockade is a positional element of chess but may also be seen as the first step of an attack. Alexei Shirov is one of the world's best attacking players and in the following game, which Shirov considers one of the best of his career, a light-square blockade opens the possibility of a devastating kingside attack.

Onishchuk – Shirov

FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2007

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c6 4 ♘f3

The main alternative is the pawn sacrifice 4 e4 dxe4 5 ♘xe4 ♗b4+ 6 ♗d2 ♕xd4 7 ♗xb4 ♕xe4+ with complicated play.

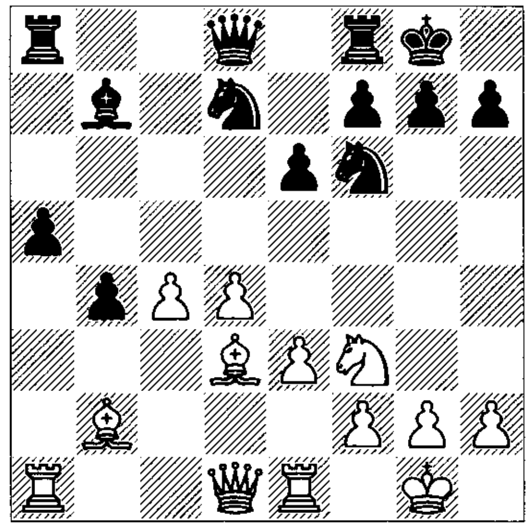
4...dxc4!?

This characterizes the sharp Abrahams/Noteboom Variation.

5 e3 b5 6 a4 ♗b4 7 ♗d2 a5 8 axb5 ♗xc3 9 ♗xc3 cxb5 10 b3 ♗b7 11 bxc4 b4 12 ♗b2 ♘f6 13 ♗d3 0-0 14 0-0 ♘bd7 15 ♖e1 *(D)*

A well-known position in the Abrahams/Noteboom. Tarrasch and other proponents of the Scientific School would probably have considered this position highly favourable for White

B



due to his strong pawn-centre and the two bishops. However, things are not so clear-cut. Black has two connected passed pawns on the queenside, and now he initiates a strategy of a kingside attack by first *blockading* White's centre on the light squares.

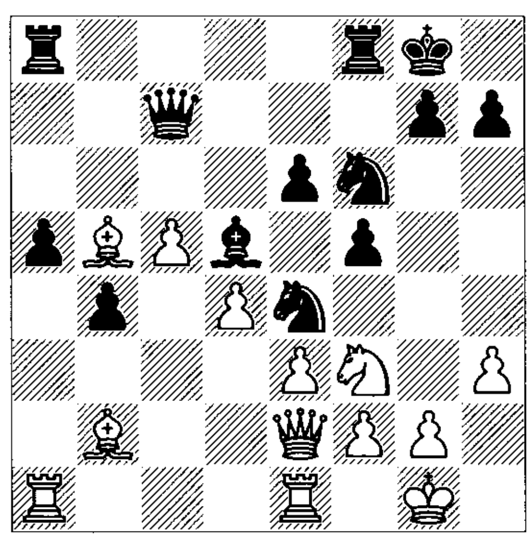
15...♘e4! 16 ♕c2 f5! 17 c5 ♕c7 18 ♗b5 ♗d5! 19 ♕e2

A novelty compared to the game Rogozenko-Apicella, Bucharest 2000, which was prematurely drawn after 19 ♖ec1 ♘df6 20 h3 – just as things were getting interesting!

19...♘df6 20 h3 *(D)*

20 ♘e5 is effectively answered by 20...♘g4!, when after 21 ♘xg4? fxg4 White has no time to take on g4 as f2 hangs.

B



20...g5!

A classical rule of thumb has it that a flank attack can only be successful if the centre is stable. Otherwise the flank attack may be answered by a strong rejoinder in the centre. However, here Black's grip on the light squares in the centre secures him from such unpleasant surprises. Still, White should be able to survive the attack, as he has not done anything wrong.

21 ♘e5 g4! 22 hxg4?

Probably the decisive mistake. Following the above-mentioned rule for countering a flank attack, White should fight for the light squares in the centre by 22 f3! gxf3 (not 22...♘g3? 23 ♕f2) 23 gxf3. In that case he would maintain dynamic equality. In his notes in *New In Chess*, Sergei Shipov (not to be confused with Alexei Shirov) gives the long and entertaining line 23...♘g5! (better than 23...♘g3?! 24 ♕h2 ♕g7 25 ♔f2 ♘fe4+!? 26 fxe4 fxe4+ 27 ♔g1 ♘e2++ 28 ♔h1 ♘g3+ 29 ♕xg3 ♕xg3 30 ♖g1 ♕xg1+ 31 ♖xg1+ ♔h8 32 ♗d7!, and White is better – Shipov) 24 ♔h1 ♔h8 25 ♖g1 ♖g8 26 ♗c4! ♘xh3 27 ♖xg8+ ♖xg8 28 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 29 ♕h2 ♘g5 30 ♕h5 ♖g7 31 ♖g1 ♘f7! 32 ♘xf7+ ♖xf7 33 c6 a4 34 e4 fxe4 35 fxe4 ♕f4! 36 exd5 ♕e4+ 37 ♖g2 ♖f1+ 38 ♔h2 ♕f4+ 39 ♖g3 ♕f2+ 40 ♖g2 ♕f4+ with a draw.

22...fxg4 23 ♘d3

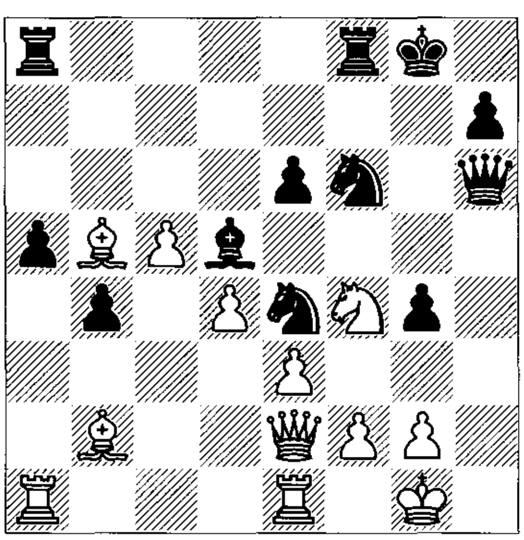
23 ♘xg4 is not sufficient after 23...♕g7! 24 f3 ♘xg4 25 fxe4 ♖f2 26 exd5 ♖xe2 27 ♗xe2 exd5 28 ♗f3 ♘f6, when White does not have sufficient compensation for the queen according to Shipov. 23 f3 is now less effective than on the previous move because after 23...♘g3, the white queen has no good square. 24 ♕f2 fails to 24...♘fe4 now that the f-file is open, while other moves are strongly met by 24...♕g7 with brutal ideas of ...♕h6 or ...gxf3.

23...♕g7!

The queen is transferred to the kingside.

24 ♘f4 ♕h6! *(D)*

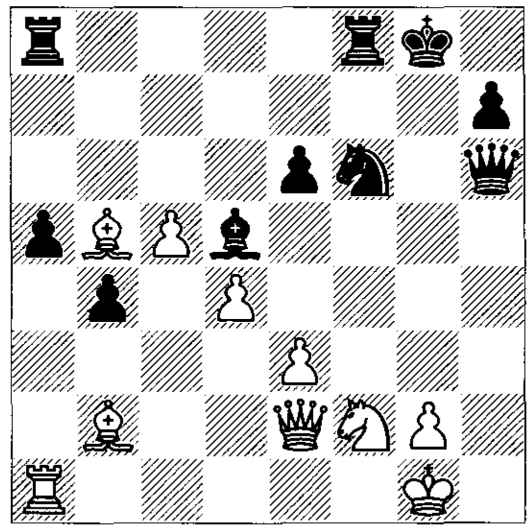
W



Shirov is a student of Tal, who introduced the notion of the *Attacking Ratio* – the number of attacking pieces compared to the number of defenders. Looking at the kingside and counting the number of pieces there, it is clear that the Attacking Ratio is in Black's favour and it is therefore not surprising that the attack breaks through. Notice how the blockading pieces on d5 and e4 prevent White from initiating counterplay in the centre.

25 ♖f1 g3 26 ♘h3 gxf2+ 27 ♖xf2 ♘xf2 28 ♘xf2 *(D)*

B



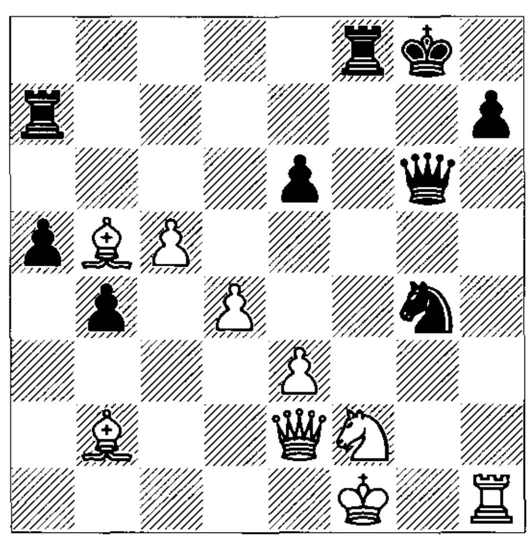
By giving up an exchange, White has survived the first wave of attack and now even threatens to break the light-squared blockade in the centre by 29 e4. However, in positions with a king-hunt, Shirov is in his element and forcefully crashes through.

28...♗xg2! 29 ♔xg2 ♖a7!

The point. The last inactive piece joins the attack with devastating consequences.

30 ♖h1 ♕g6+ 31 ♔f1 ♘g4 *(D)*

W



32 ♗e8!

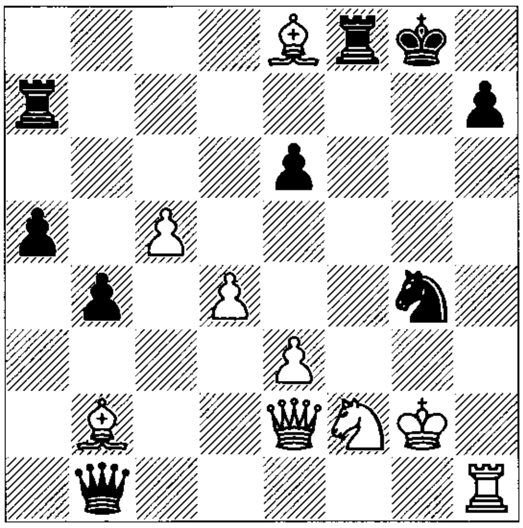
An ingenious attempt as 32 ♕xg4 ♕xg4 33 ♖g1 loses prosaically to 33...♖xf2+! 34 ♔xf2 ♖f7+. 32 ♖g1 also loses, to 32...♘h2+.

32...♕b1+ 33 ♔g2 *(D)*

33...♖xf2+! 34 ♕xf2 ♕xh1+! 35 ♔xh1 ♘xf2+ 36 ♔g2 ♘d1

The black passed pawns easily outrun their white counterparts.

B

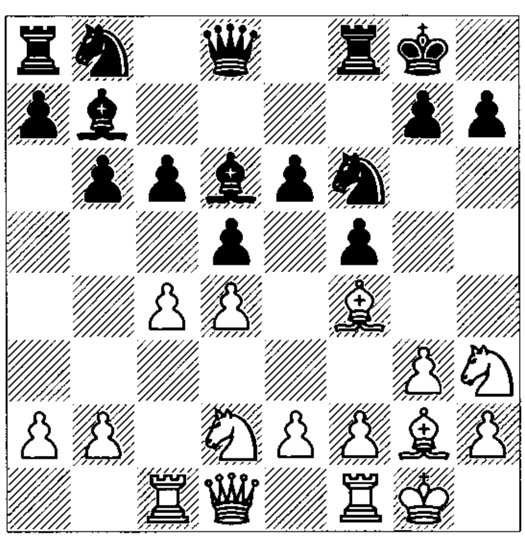


37 ♗c1 b3 38 e4 b2 39 ♗xb2 ♘xb2 40 ♗b5 a4 41 d5 exd5 42 exd5 a3 0-1

A brilliant game by Shirov, combining classical notions of positional play with modern dynamics.

As will be clear from the examples above, blockade is very much about good squares for the knights. Again, the notion in my use is broader than Nimzowitsch intended it. Knights that land on good blockading squares may dominate a position, as in the following example.

W



Goldin – L.B. Hansen
Warsaw 1990

In the late 1980s and early 1990s I liked to play the Stonewall Dutch (1 d4 f5 2 c4 e6 3 g3 ♘f6 4 ♗g2 d5). However, it must be played accurately, as it abandons the key central square e5, a nice square on which a knight should not be allowed to settle undisturbed.

10 cxd5 cxd5?

An instructive mistake. I forgot White's next move.

11 ♘c4!

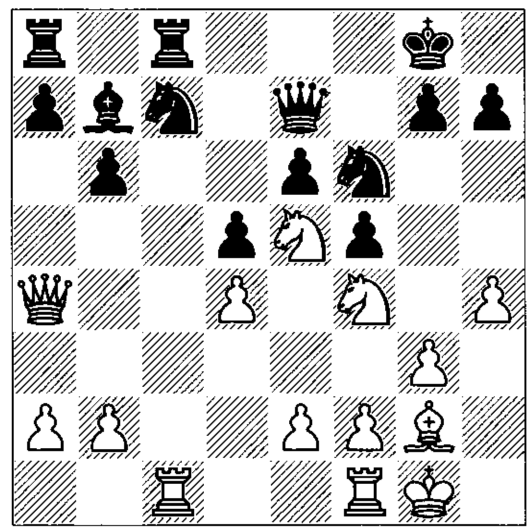
A typical shot in the Stonewall. Not only does the knight reach e5 with tempo, but it also forces a favourable exchange of the dark-squared bishops.

11...♗xf4

Black cannot really avoid the exchange as 11...♗e7 is strongly met by 12 ♘g5 attacking the e6-pawn.

12 ♘xf4 ♕e7 13 ♘e5 ♘a6 14 ♕a4 ♖fc8 15 h4 ♘c7 *(D)*

W



Look at those powerful knights, completely dominating the position! Furthermore, the white bishop is better than its black counterpart, and the knights will help White win the battle for the only open file on the board. White is already positionally winning.

16 ♖c2!

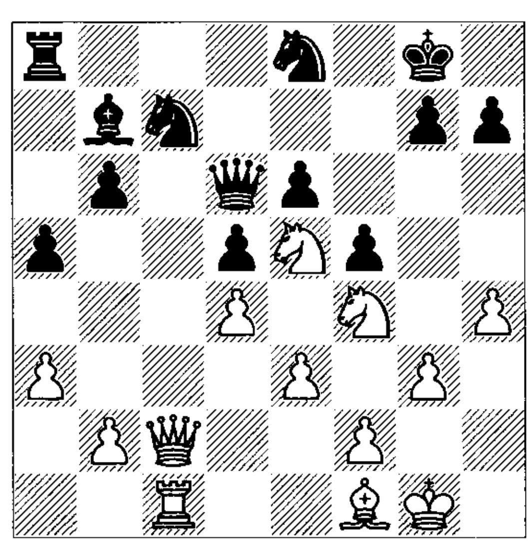
The open file is another Nimzowitsch element!

16...a5 17 ♖fc1 ♘a6 18 a3 ♖xc2 19 ♕xc2! ♕d6

Black cannot oppose White's control of the c-file as 19...♖c8? loses to 20 ♕xc8+ ♗xc8 21 ♖xc8+ ♘e8 22 ♘xe6! ♕xe6 23 ♗xd5!. Notice the influence of the blockading knights!

20 e3 ♘e8 21 ♗f1 ♘ac7 *(D)*

W



22 g4!

Opening a second front. The black pieces are too poorly coordinated and cannot come to the king's rescue in time.

22...fxg4

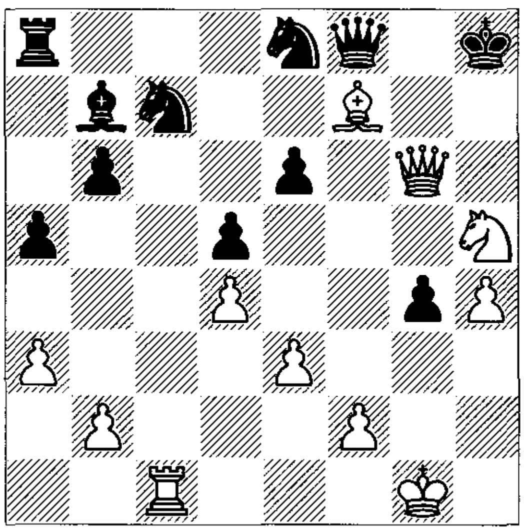
22...g6 is no better: 23 gxf5 (or 23 g5 followed by 24 h5) 23...gxf5 (23...exf5 24 h5 g5 25 ♕xf5!) 24 f3.

23 ♗d3! g6 24 ♗xg6! ♕e7 25 ♗f7+ ♔g7 26 ♘h5+ ♔h8 27 ♘g6+!

Fittingly, the knights get the final word.

27...hxg6 28 ♕xg6 ♕f8 *(D)*

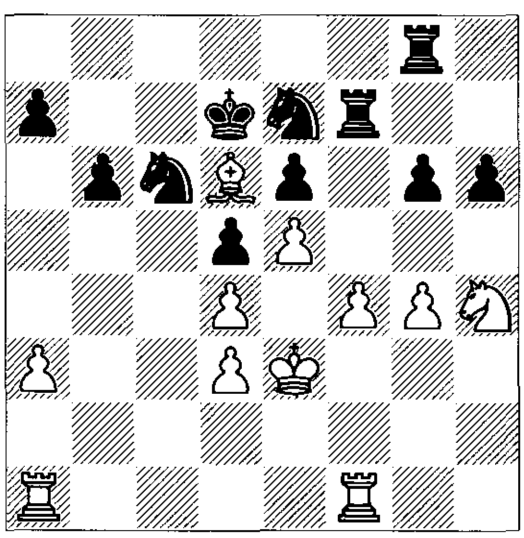
W



29 ♖xc7! ♘xc7 30 ♘f6! 1-0

Black is mated after 30...♕g7 31 ♕h5+.

B



Lau – L.B. Hansen

Rapidplay, Copenhagen 1992

Black has the better pawn-structure but needs to find some good squares for his knights. Therefore...

26...h5! 27 g5 ♘f5+ 28 ♘xf5 exf5!

The right recapture! In the long run, White cannot prevent the remaining knight from reaching its dream blockading square on e6.

29 ♖ac1 ♖c8 30 a4 ♖h7 31 ♖h1 ♖hh8 32 ♖c3 ♘a5 33 ♖hc1 ♖xc3 34 ♖xc3 ♘c6 35 a5!?

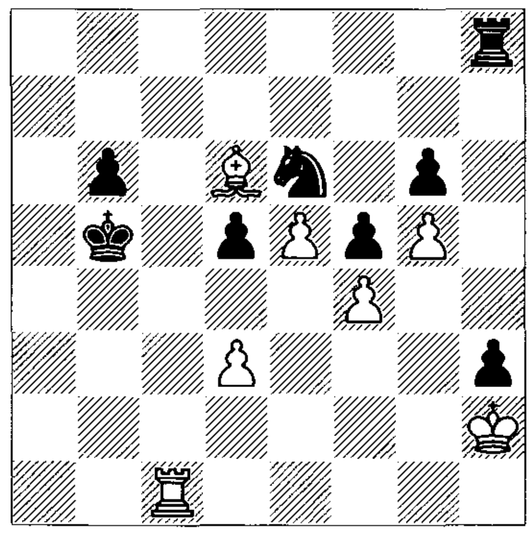
White must seek counterplay before Black has time for 35...♖c8 and ...♘d8-e6, or alternatively the raid forward with the h-pawn as in the game.

35...h4! 36 ♔f2 h3 37 ♔g1 ♖c8! 38 axb6 axb6 39 ♖a3

39 ♔h2 ♘xd4 40 ♖xc8 ♔xc8 41 ♔xh3 ♘e6 (finally!) 42 ♔g3 ♔b7 is hopeless for White, as the black king penetrates.

39...♘xd4 40 ♔h2 ♖h8! 41 ♖a7+ ♔c6 42 ♖c7+ ♔b5 43 ♖c1 ♘e6 *(D)*

W



Finally the knight reaches the square that it has dreamt about since move 28! Black is winning.

44 ♗c7

44 ♖f1 is met by 44...♖h4!.

44...♘xf4 45 d4 ♘e6

Back again!

46 ♖h1 ♔c4 47 ♗xb6 ♘xg5 48 ♖f1 ♖b8 49 ♗c5 ♖b2+ 50 ♔h1 ♘e6 0-1

It is fitting that White resigned just as the knight had once again returned to its blockading square.

Prophylaxis

The term *prophylaxis* is one of the elements of positional chess that Nimzowitsch made a household device. However, the term is nowadays used more broadly than Nimzowitsch's original intention – as with a number of his other elements. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Nimzowitsch himself did not make it all the way to the top. He accused Tarrasch of being overly dogmatic in his defence of the

Scientific School, but in some sense the same argument can be used against Nimzowitsch himself. In his own games he stood his ground a little too firmly. It was for later generations to refine and employ Nimzowitsch's theories to the fullest potential. As John Watson has pointed out in *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*, contemporary grandmasters use the notion 'prophylaxis' as meaning something like *pervasive prevention*. It can be found in many games from the highest level.

Carlsen – Adams

FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♕c2 d5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 ♕xc3 dxc4

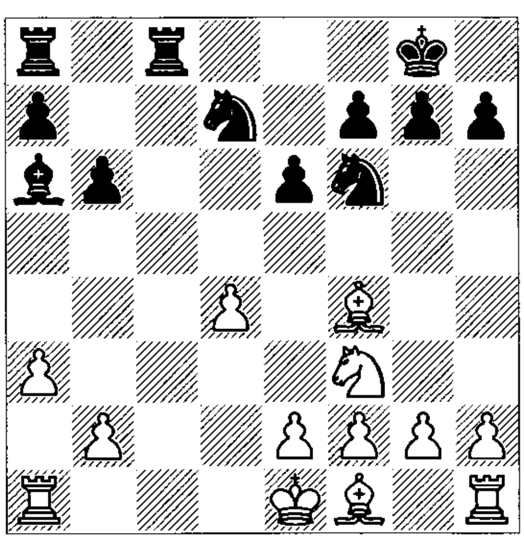
A relatively rare line that has gained popularity in recent years.

7 ♕xc4 b6 8 ♗f4

The critical continuation. White ambitiously goes after the c7-pawn at the expense of falling behind in development. A few days earlier in the same tournament M.Gurevich declined the gift against Adams but achieved nothing: 8 ♘f3 0-0 9 ♗f4 (9 ♗g5 ♗a6 10 ♕c2 c5!? 11 dxc5 bxc5 12 ♖d1 ♕a5+ 13 ♗d2 ♕b6 was equal in Karpov-Topalov, Vitoria 2007) 9...♗a6 10 ♕c2 ♘bd7 11 ♖d1 ♕c8 12 g3 c5 13 ♗g2 ♗b7 14 dxc5 ½-½.

8...♗a6 9 ♕xc7 ♕xc7 10 ♗xc7 0-0 11 ♘f3 ♖c8 12 ♗f4 ♘bd7 *(D)*

W

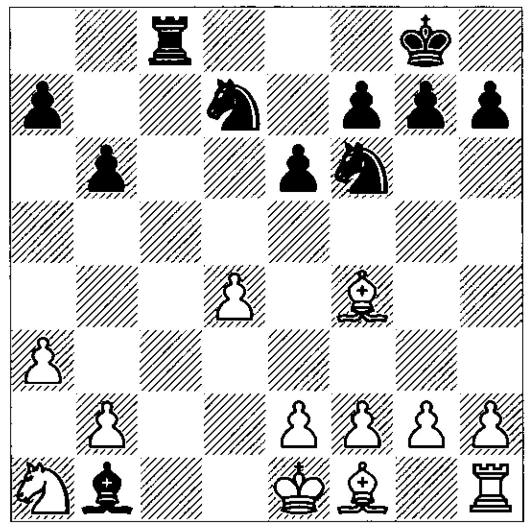


13 ♘d2!?

The start of an interesting *prophylactic* plan. White intends to transfer his knight to a1(!) in order to *prevent* Black from using the c2-square.

13...♖c2 14 ♖b1 ♖ac8 15 ♘b3! ♗c4 16 ♘a1! ♗a2 17 ♘xc2 ♗xb1 18 ♘a1 *(D)*

B



White has managed to neutralize Black's play via the c-file and can now proceed with normal development. However, Black still has ample compensation for his pawn.

18...♘d5 19 ♗d2 e5!

Black must play actively to keep White busy.

20 e3 exd4 21 exd4 ♘b8 22 f3 ♘c6 23 ♗c4?!

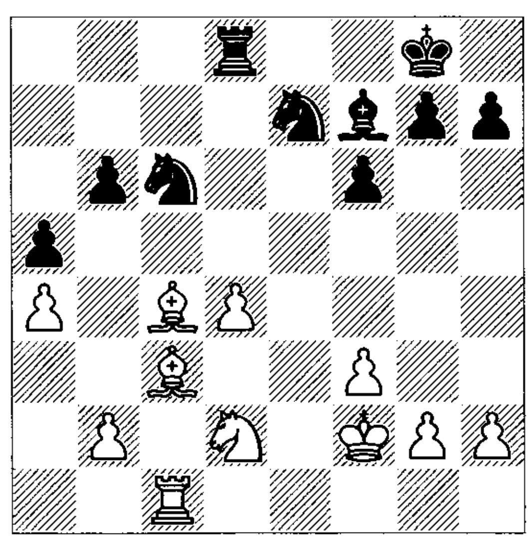
According to Carlsen's notes in *New In Chess*, 23 ♔f2 ♗a2 24 b3 ♘xd4 25 ♗c4 is somewhat better for White.

23...♖d8?!

And here Magnus recommends 23...♘cb4 24 b3 ♘d3+ 25 ♔f1 ♘c7 26 ♔e2 (26 a4 ♖e8) 26...♖e8+ 27 ♗e3 ♘f4+ 28 ♔f2 ♘d3+ 29 ♔g3 b5 30 ♗xd3 ♗xd3, when White's winning chances are slim.

24 ♔f2 ♗f5 25 ♘b3 ♗e6 26 ♖c1 f6 27 a4 a5 28 ♗c3 ♗f7 29 ♘d2 ♘de7 *(D)*

W



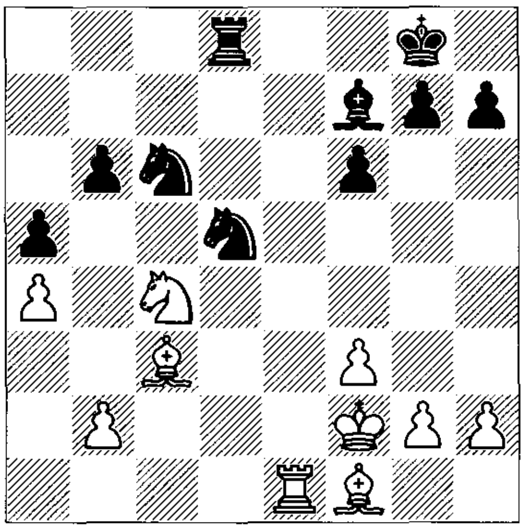
30 ♗f1!?

White could maintain his extra pawn by 30 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 31 ♘b3, but Black's firm command of the d5-square renders it hard to make progress. Instead Carlsen returns the pawn to open the position for his bishops – what Capablanca called 'transformation of advantages'.

Magnus has spotted a nice idea based on *prophylaxis*.

30...♘xd4 31 ♖e1 ♘dc6 32 ♘c4 ♘d5 *(D)*

W

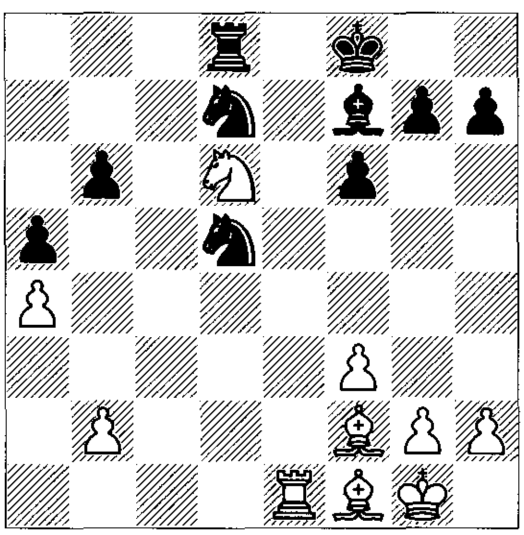


33 ♖b1!

There it is! Black cannot take on c3 as b6 then falls, and therefore he cannot prevent the transfer of the white bishop to f2, from where it targets b6.

33...♔f8 34 ♗e1! ♔e7 35 ♔g1! ♘b8 36 ♗f2 ♘d7 37 ♖e1+ ♔f8 38 ♖d1 ♔e7 39 ♖e1+ ♔f8 40 ♘d6 *(D)*

B



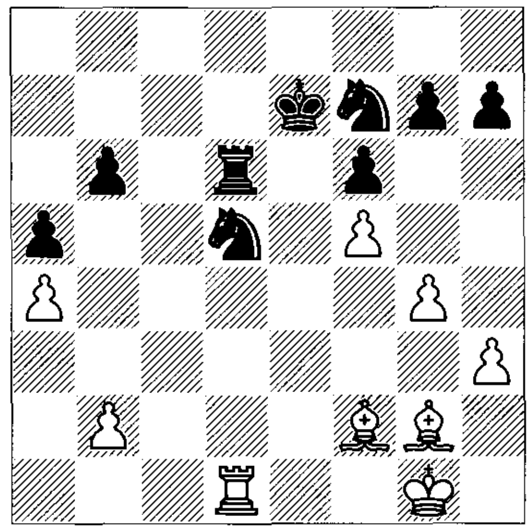
Going for a pure two bishops vs two knights endgame with good winning chances.

40...♘e5 41 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 42 ♖d1 ♔e7 43 f4 ♘g4 44 ♖e1+ ♔f8 45 ♗d4 ♖d6 46 h3 ♘h6

In his notes Magnus explains that he doesn't agree with the computer's assessment of the endgame after 46...♘xf4 47 ♖e4! ♘e6 48 ♖xe6 ♖xe6 49 hxg4 ♖e4 50 ♗xb6 ♖xa4. The computer seems to think that Black has drawing chances, while Carlsen considers it winning. I agree with Magnus, and apparently so does Adams.

47 ♖d1 ♘f5 48 ♗f2 ♔e7 49 g4! ♘h6 50 f5! ♘f7 51 ♗g2 *(D)*

B



In the spirit of Steinitz, White has deprived Black of good protected squares for his knights, and now Black cannot prevent the loss of a pawn.

51...♘f4 52 ♖xd6 ♘xd6 53 ♗xb6 ♘c4 54 ♗c5+ ♔d7 55 ♗f1

Perhaps 55 b3 ♘xg2 (55...♘d2? 56 ♗e3) 56 ♔xg2 ♘d2 57 b4 was easier. This bishop vs knight ending arises in a few moves from now anyway.

55...♘xb2 56 ♗b5+ ♔d8 57 ♗b6+ ♔e7 58 ♔h2! ♘d5 59 ♗xa5 ♔d6 60 ♗d2 ♔c5 61 ♔g3 ♘c7 62 ♗e3+ ♔b4 63 ♗d2+ ♔c5 64 ♗c1 ♘c4 65 ♗xc4 ♔xc4 66 ♗d2 ♘a6 67 a5

This is a fairly easy win for White. The knight is a poor defender against an outside passed pawn, and Black's kingside pawns are on the colour of the bishop.

67...♔b5 68 ♔f3 ♘c5 69 ♗c3 h6 70 ♔e3 ♔c4 71 ♗d4 ♘a6 72 ♔e4 ♘b4 73 h4 ♔b5 74 ♗c3 ♘a6 75 ♔d5 ♘c5 76 ♗d4 ♘d3 77 ♔e6 1-0

A very mature game by the Norwegian prodigy.

I have good memories about a similar variation in the Classical Nimzo-Indian. The following was a key game at the tournament where I made my second GM norm.

L.B. Hansen – Farago

Tåstrup 1990

1 d4 e6 2 c4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♕c2 0-0 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 ♕xc3 b6 7 ♗g5 ♗a6!?

The normal move is 7...♗b7.

8 ♘f3 c5 9 dxc5 bxc5 10 e3 ♘c6?!

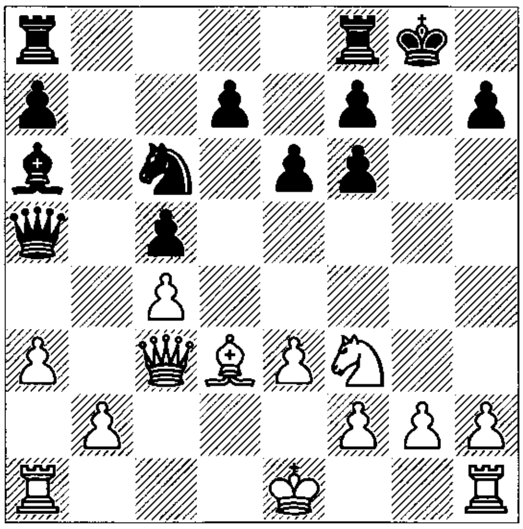
Typically Black prefers a set-up with ...d6 and ...♘bd7. I think that would be better.

11 ♗d3 ♕a5

Black's idea, but there is a problem.

12 ♗xf6 gxf6 *(D)*

W



13 b4!

In this way White prevents the exchange of queens and starts probing Black's vulnerable kingside.

13...cxb4 14 ♕xf6 bxa3+

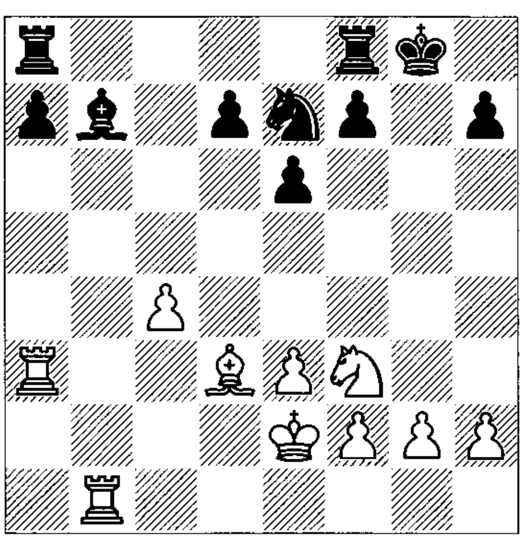
Perhaps 14...b3+ was better. Now an ending arises more or less by force, in which Black is struggling.

15 ♔e2 ♕c5 16 ♖hc1!

16 ♘g5 is premature because of 16...♗xc4, but now 17 ♘g5 is a lethal threat; e.g., 16...d5 17 ♘g5 ♗xc4 18 ♖xc4 and White wins.

16...♕e7 17 ♕xe7 ♘xe7 18 ♖xa3 ♗b7 19 ♖b1! *(D)*

B



This forces Black to part with his bishop as 19...♗c6 is met by 20 ♖ba1 ♘c8 (20...♖fb8 21 ♖xa7 ♖xa7 22 ♖xa7 ♖b2+ 23 ♔f1 gives Black insufficient compensation for the pawn) 21 ♘e5.

19...♗xf3+ 20 gxf3!

A key move. The black knight is prevented from reaching e5 with check, and the open g-file gives White additional attacking options.

20...♘c6 21 ♗e4

Again 21...♘e5 is prevented.

21...♖ab8 22 ♖b5!

Stronger than winning a pawn by 22 ♖xb8 ♖xb8 23 ♗xc6 dxc6 24 ♖xa7 ♖b2+, when Black has decent drawing chances after either 25 ♔e1 ♖c2 or 25 ♔d3 ♖xf2.

22...♖b6 23 f4!

Making room for the king on f3.

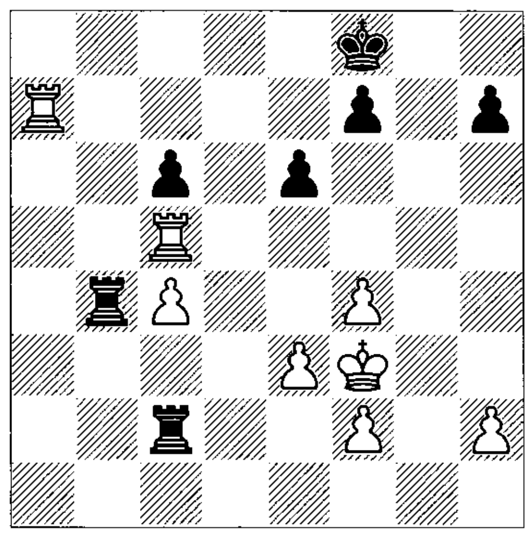
23...♖fb8 24 ♗xc6

Having prevented Black's counterplay, White finally takes the pawn.

24...dxc6 25 ♖g5+! ♔f8 26 ♖xa7 ♖b2+ 27 ♔f3 ♖c2 28 ♖c5 ♖b4 *(D)*

Or 28...♖bb2 29 ♖xc6 ♖xf2+ 30 ♔e4 ♖xh2 31 ♖cc7 and White wins.

W



29 f5! ♖bxc4?!

This allows mate, but 29...exf5 30 ♖xf5 was hopeless too.

30 f6! ♔e8 31 ♖g5 1-0

Of the contemporary top players, Vladimir Kramnik is probably the player that most persistently exploits the notion of prophylaxis in his games. In fact, Kramnik's entire style may be said to be based upon 'pervasive prevention', which is the modern interpretation of prophylaxis. Here is an example where the traces of prophylaxis can be seen throughout the game.

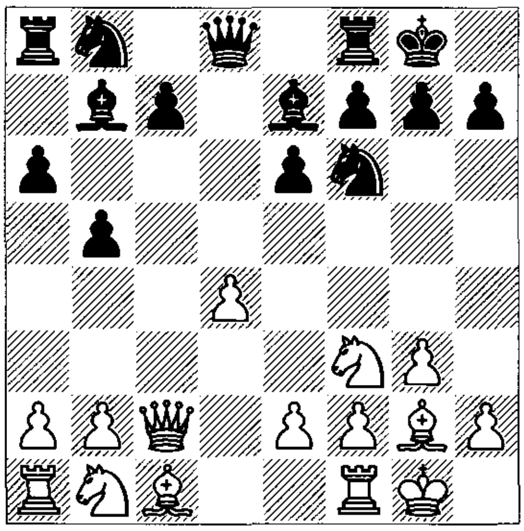
Kramnik – Anand

Wijk aan Zee 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 ♗g2 ♗e7 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 0-0 dxc4 7 ♕c2 a6 8 ♕xc4 b5 9 ♕c2 ♗b7 *(D)*

10 ♗d2

W



This seemingly modest move was popularized by Sosonko in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It fits Kramnik's prophylactic style perfectly. 10 ♗d2 has now superseded the older moves 10 ♗g5 (which I have played on several occasions) and 10 ♗f4 as White's most popular choice in this position. The idea is simple and would have pleased Nimzowitsch. It is in line with his notion of prophylaxis. Black's strategic aim is to carry out the thrust ...c5, after which he will have no problems. The little bishop move is designed to prevent this plan by voluntarily sidelining the bishop on a5. The pin on the c-pawn will make it difficult for Black to carry out the freeing push. The game now enters a manoeuvring phase where the battle is centred around the possibility of Black playing ...c5.

10...♖a7 11 ♖c1 ♗e4 12 ♕b3 ♘c6 13 e3 ♕a8 14 ♕d1 ♘b8

Some months after this game, Leko tried to improve on Anand's play in another game against Kramnik from the Tal Memorial in Moscow 2007. He chose 14...b4, which did indeed enable him to play ...c5. However, here we see another example of Capablanca's 'transformation of advantages'. In return for being 'allowed' to carry out the freeing push, Black must accept a weak b4-pawn. The game went 15 ♕f1 ♗d5 16 ♗e1 (notice how skilfully Kramnik is manoeuvring on the back rank – a special ability that he shares with Karpov) 16...♖c8 17 ♘bd2 ♘a5 18 ♘e5 c5 (finally! However, it is not sufficient to equalize fully) 19 dxc5 ♗xc5 20 ♘d3 ♗f8 21 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 22 e4 ♘b6 23 ♖xc8 ♕xc8 24 ♘f3 ♕b7 25 ♘xb4 ♕xe4 26 ♕d3 ♕xd3 27 ♘xd3 ♘ac4 28 b3 ♘d6 29 ♖c1, and with his queenside majority and possession of the c-file, White had an edge which Kramnik duly converted in 62 moves.

15 ♗a5

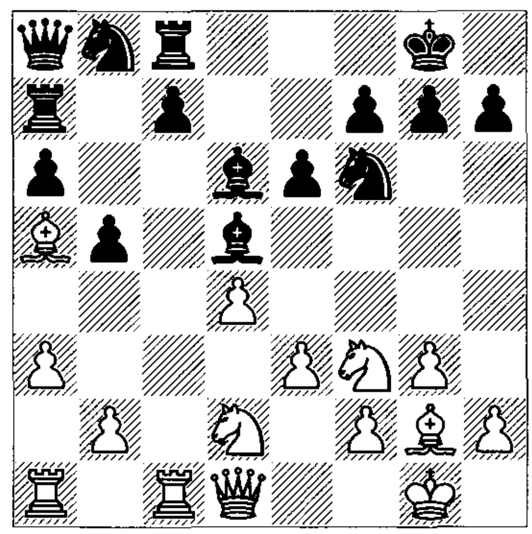
The bishop doesn't look great here but it does a good job of hitting c7. At the same time it impedes ...c5, as Black must then always look out for ♗b6.

15...♖c8 16 a3!

This is a strong novelty compared to the game Gelfand-Kariakin, Wijk aan Zee 2006, in which 16 ♘bd2 didn't yield White much. The text-move maintains the option of developing the knight to c3 in some lines.

16...♗d6 17 ♘bd2 ♗d5 *(D)*

W



18 ♕f1!

A strong positional move. White prepares ♘e1-d3, once more impeding ...c5. White is also ready to take serious measures against ...c5 with b4 (even at the expense of leaving the bishop on a5 out of play) but as Kramnik explains in his notes in *New In Chess*, White does not want to play b4 as long as Black can answer it with ...♘c6; only when Black has committed himself to ...♘bd7 will White play b4.

18...♘bd7

The desired 18...c5? fails to 19 ♗b6.

19 b4! e5!?

Black must look for counterplay before he ends up in a positional squeeze.

20 dxe5 ♗xe5

Black has to abandon the two bishops, as 20...♘xe5 is strongly met by 21 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 22 ♖a2!, exploiting the pin on the long diagonal to facilitate the doubling of rooks on the c-file.

21 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 22 f3!

White intends to dominate the centre by playing e4.

22...♘c4?!

According to Kramnik this is inaccurate. Better was 22...♗c4, although White obtains

the better chances by sacrificing an exchange with 23 ♘xc4 ♘xc4 24 ♖xc4 bxc4 25 ♕xc4. Still, this was Black's best bet.

23 ♘xc4 ♗xc4 24 ♕f2!

Now White need not even sacrifice material. He simply threatens e4-e5 and f4.

24...♖e8 25 e4 c6 26 ♖d1

The bishop on a5 helps White take control of the only open file on the board.

26...♖d7 27 ♖xd7 ♘xd7 28 ♖d1 ♕b7 29 ♖d6 f6 30 f4

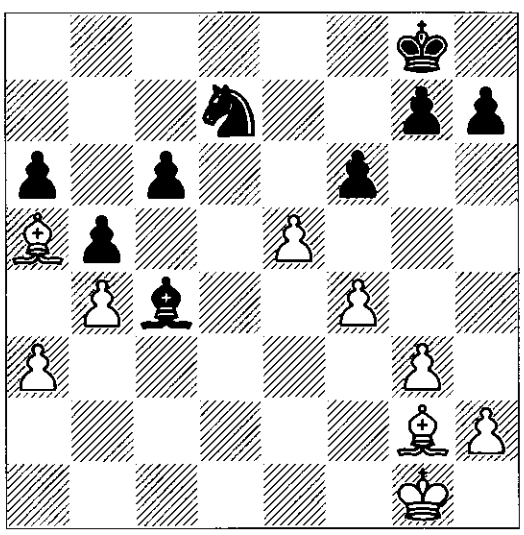
Not bad, but in hindsight Kramnik preferred 30 ♕d4.

30...♖e6 31 ♖d2 ♖e7 32 ♕d4 ♘f8 33 ♕d8 ♖d7

According to Kramnik, 33...♔f7 was a better chance. Now White gets a favourable ending with the pair of bishops. Kramnik is probably the world's leading expert in handling the two bishops.

34 ♖xd7 ♕xd7 35 ♕xd7 ♘xd7 36 e5! *(D)*

B



Bishops need open diagonals!

36...fxe5 37 ♗xc6 ♘f6

37...♘b8 loses to 38 ♗b7 exf4 39 ♗c7! ♘d7 40 ♗xf4, and a6 falls. The text-move sets a small trap, but Kramnik does not fall for it.

38 ♗b7!

The trap was 38 fxe5? ♗d5!, and even if White wins a pawn Black is able to draw by setting up a fortress on the light squares.

38...exf4 39 gxf4 ♘d5 40 ♔f2!

In strategic endgames, king activity is vital.

40...♘xf4?!

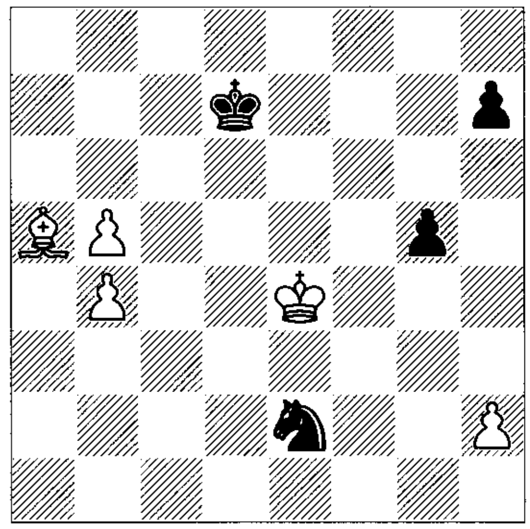
Missing the last chance to fight for a draw. According to Kramnik, 40...♗b3! 41 ♗xa6 ♗a4! is correct, to prevent White from setting up an outside passed pawn. In that case White still has to work hard to find a win.

41 ♔e3 g5 42 ♗xa6 ♔f7 43 a4!

That's the problem. Black cannot handle the passed pawn that now emerges.

43...♔e7 44 ♗xb5 ♗xb5 45 axb5 ♔d7 46 ♔e4 ♘e2 *(D)*

W



47 ♗b6!

The last finesse. Black's only chance to draw is to push his h- and g-pawns, but now the bishop returns home and prevents this idea. The loss of one of the b-pawns is not significant.

47...g4 48 ♗f2 ♘c3+ 49 ♔f5 ♘xb5 50 ♔xg4 ♔e6 51 ♔g5 ♔f7 52 ♔f5 ♔e7 53 ♗c5+ 1-0

Black's king has to choose: either to defend the h-pawn by 53...♔f7, after which 54 ♔e5 followed by 55 ♔d5 and 56 ♔c6 wins, or to help the knight blockade the b-pawn with 53...♔d7, when 54 ♔g5 followed by 55 ♔h6 wins.

Overprotection

The term *overprotection* is probably one of the least used elements of Nimzowitsch's system. The notion strikes many as abstract and difficult to understand. This criticism does have merit, but overprotection is still a useful concept. The basic idea is simple – that some squares or pawns are more valuable than others and therefore require extra attention. However, why should these squares or pawns be *over*protected – is it not enough merely to *protect* them? No, says Nimzowitsch and he explains why: if, for example, a vital central pawn is attacked three times and defended three times, the initiative lies with the attacker. At any given point in time the attacker may choose to shift one of his attacking pieces towards another target.

The defender can afford himself no such luxury. That would lose the pawn. However, by *overprotecting* the pawn – that is, prophylactically defending it one more time than necessary – the defender retains the flexibility of all the defending pieces. They are 'voluntarily' engaged in defending the pawn and may at any moment shift to other tasks.

It is true that in practice grandmasters rarely think explicitly in terms of overprotection. It comes more intuitively. However, in one of my games, the notion explicitly helped me find the right continuation at a critical juncture in a game.

L.B. Hansen – Hellers
Denmark-Sweden match, Hinnerup 1995

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 ♘c3!?

This rare line is not without venom, and I have employed it successfully in a number of games. It has the benefit of preventing both the King's Indian and the Grünfeld.

3...d5

The drawback seen from a 1 d4 player like myself is that Black can transpose into a normal Pirc Defence (a 1 e4 opening) with 3...♗g7, after which White does not really have anything better than 4 e4. However, this is not to the liking of all King's Indian or Grünfeld players either.

4 ♗f4 ♗g7 5 e3 0-0 6 ♗e2 ♗g4

The other main line is 6...c5, which I believe is better.

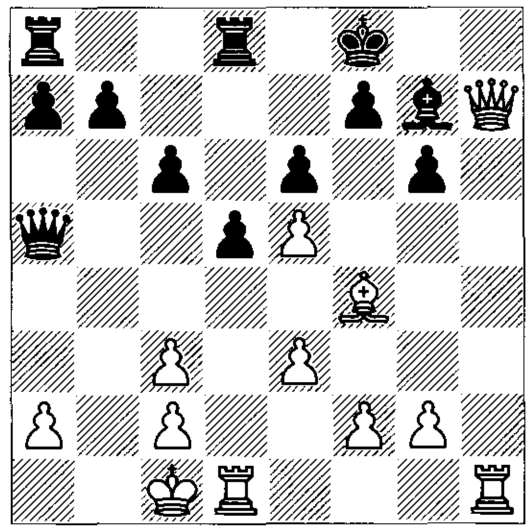
7 ♘e5 ♗xe2 8 ♕xe2 ♘h5

Black has a number of alternatives here but they may not be better:

a) 8...♘bd7 9 h4 c5 10 0-0-0 cxd4 11 exd4 e6 12 g4 ♖c8 13 ♖d3 ♘xe5 14 ♗xe5 ♖c4 15 h5 ♕e7 16 hxg6 fxg6 17 ♖e3 ♖c6 18 ♔b1 gave me a solid positional advantage in L.B.Hansen-Seger, Bundesliga 2001/2.

b) 8...c6 has led to some brilliant wins for White; e.g., 9 h4 ♕a5 10 0-0-0 ♘bd7 11 h5 ♘xe5 12 dxe5 ♘e4 (12...♘xh5 13 ♖xh5! gxh5 14 ♕xh5 is too perilous for Black) 13 hxg6 hxg6 14 ♕g4 ♘xc3 15 bxc3 ♖fd8 (or 15...♕a3+ 16 ♔d2 e6 17 ♖h3 c5 18 ♕h4 ♖fc8 19 ♖dh1 ♔f8 20 ♕g5! ♔e8 21 ♖h7 d4 22 ♖xg7 ♕xc3+ 23 ♔e2 1-0 Hebden-Krakops, Cappelle la Grande 1995) 16 ♕h4 ♔f8 17 ♕h7 e6 *(D)*.

W



18 ♕xg7+?! (flashy, but the simple 18 ♗h6 is much better) 18...♔xg7 19 ♗g5! f6? (certainly not 19...♖g8? 20 ♗h6+ ♔h7 21 ♗f8#, but Black can probably save himself by 19...f5! – then White has nothing better than continuing as in the game, but Black will then have an extra pawn on f5, and this difference should be sufficient to enable him to hold the ensuing endgame) 20 ♗xf6+ ♔f7 21 ♖h7+ ♔e8 22 ♖dh1! ♕a3+ 23 ♔b1 ♕f8 24 ♖h8 ♖db8 25 ♖1h7 ♕xh8 26 ♖xh8+ ♔f7 27 ♖h7+ ♔f8 28 g4! (now the pawns start rolling, but imagine if Black had a pawn on f5!) 28...b5 29 f4 b4 30 cxb4 a5 31 f5! gxf5 32 g5! ♖xb4+ 33 ♔c1 ♖ab8 34 g6 ♔e8 35 ♖h8+ ♔d7 36 g7 c5 37 ♖f8! 1-0 Le Roux-Kreisl, Mitropa Cup, Szeged 2007.

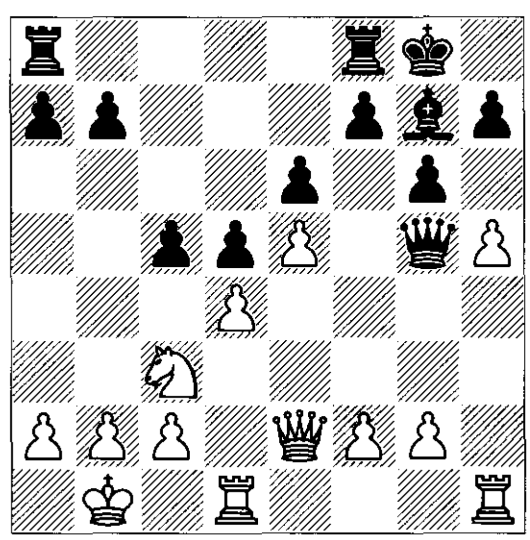
9 h4 ♘xf4 10 exf4 ♘c6!

Now the game enters more positional patterns.

11 0-0-0 e6 12 h5 ♘xe5 13 fxe5 ♕g5+ 14 ♔b1 c5! *(D)*

Obviously not 14...♕xg2?? 15 ♖dg1.

W



Now White faces a tough choice. Black is close to destroying the white centre, and initially I was pessimistic about my position. However, then I came up with an idea based on

overprotection. Since Black has successfully managed to undermine the chain's base pawn – exactly as Nimzowitsch prescribes – White's attention shifts to e5, which must be overprotected. Therefore I played...

15 ♖de1!

If White can hold on to the e5-pawn for a few moves, he has time to build up play on the kingside. In the game this plan works wonderfully.

15...♖ac8

15...cxd4 16 ♘b5 just transposes.

16 ♘b5 cxd4

Perhaps Black could try 16...a6!? 17 ♘d6 ♖c7. The white knight might be less menacing on d6 than on d4, where it acts as a typical blockading knight.

17 ♘xd4 ♖c4 18 ♕d3 ♕xg2!?

18...♗xe5? loses to 19 ♘f3. However, the queen is not feeling comfortable on g2.

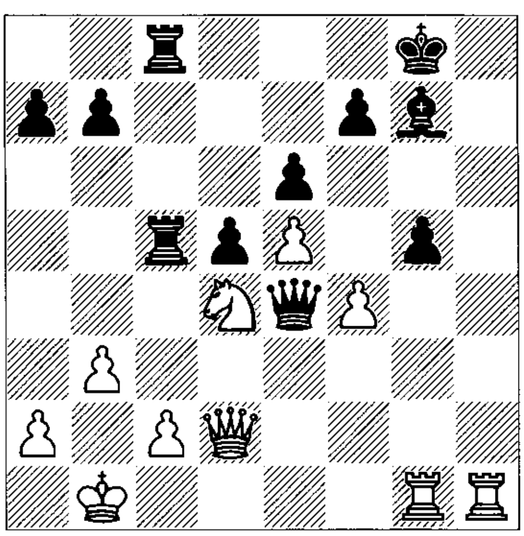
19 b3 ♖c5 20 hxg6 hxg6

Not 20...♕xg6 21 ♕d2 followed by 22 ♖eg1 with a strong attack.

21 ♕d2 ♖fc8 22 ♖eg1 ♕e4 23 f4 g5 *(D)*

Sadly forced as White was threatening to trap the queen with 24 ♖e1.

W



24 ♖h2!

This exploits the pin on the g-file after 24...♕xf4 (or 24...gxf4 25 ♖hg2) 25 ♕xf4 gxf4 26 ♖hg2.

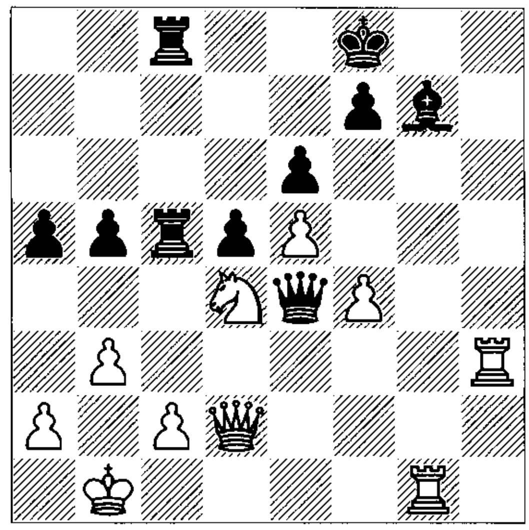
24...♔f8 25 ♖xg5 b6 26 ♖h3 a5 27 ♖g1 b5 *(D)*

28 ♕d3!

White wins a piece! Black is defenceless against the threat of 29 ♖h7, trapping the bishop on g7.

28...♕xd3 29 cxd3 ♖c3 30 ♘xb5 ♖c2 31 ♘d6 ♖8c6 32 ♖h7

W



Black's counterplay is too late in coming.

32...♖f2 33 ♖gxg7 ♖cc2 34 ♖xf7+ ♔g8 35 ♖fg7+ ♔f8 36 ♖c7! ♖b2+ 37 ♔c1 ♖xa2 38 ♖c8# (1-0)

As discussed earlier, Nimzowitsch lived in my home country during the last years of his life, and his influence is clearly traceable in the games of most of the top Danish players. Here my compatriot Sune Berg Hansen (no relation) exploits the concepts of *overprotection* and *blockade*.

S.B. Hansen – Brynell

Gothenburg 1998

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘fd7 5 ♗d3 c5 6 c3 ♘c6 7 ♘e2 ♕b6 8 ♘f3 cxd4 9 cxd4 f6 10 exf6 ♘xf6 11 0-0 ♗d6 12 b3

Sune is very critical towards the French Defence, which he considers too passive. "It is an opening for masochists!" he claims. The 12 b3 variation is his speciality.

12...0-0 13 ♗f4 ♗xf4 14 ♘xf4 ♘e4

An alternative here is 14...♗d7. In J.Houska-M.Socko, European Women's Team Ch, Khersonisos 2007, Black managed to cut the knot in the centre after 15 ♖e1 ♖ae8 16 ♖c1 ♘xd4! 17 ♘xd4 e5 18 ♘xd5 ♕xd4 19 ♘xf6+ ♖xf6 20 ♗c4+ ♔f8, with only a symbolic advantage for White.

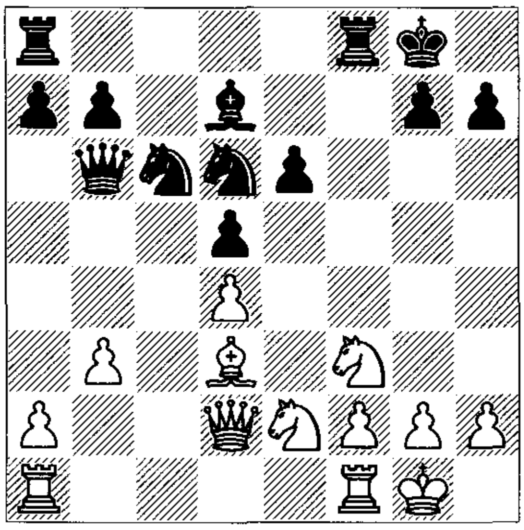
15 ♘e2

The battle for the dark squares in the centre begins. Notice how on the next few moves White consistently overprotects d4. The strategic idea behind this overprotection is to free the knights – his dream is to turn them into blockading knights! This is the key to understanding the overprotection concept – by overprotecting

d4 White actually *increases* the mobility of his pieces.

15...♘d6 16 ♕d2 ♗d7 *(D)*

W



17 ♖ad1! ♘f5 18 ♗b1!

White consistently carries out his overprotection strategy.

18...a5 19 ♘c3 ♘ce7 20 ♘e5

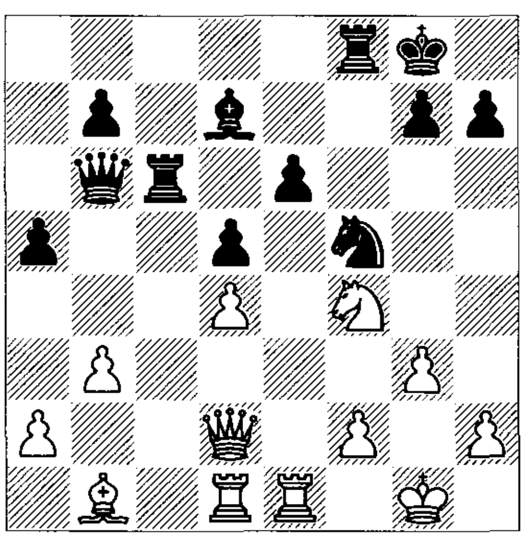
The knights start taking up their dream positions, facilitated by the overprotection of d4.

20...♗e8 21 ♖fe1 ♖c8 22 ♘e2!

White redirects the knight to target the backward e6-pawn from f4.

22...♘c6 23 ♘xc6 ♖xc6 24 ♘f4 ♗d7 25 g3 *(D)*

B



25...a4?

Too compliant. White is certainly better, but this pawn sacrifice facilitates his task.

26 bxa4 ♖c4 27 ♗xf5 ♖xf5 28 a5 ♕c6 29 ♖c1 ♖f8 30 ♘d3!

White is winning. The knight is headed for c5, from where it hits b7 and e6 simultaneously.

30...♕d6 31 ♘c5 ♗c8 32 ♕b2 h6 33 ♖e5 ♖xc1+ 34 ♕xc1 b6

Now White has a clear extra pawn, but how else can Black free the bishop on c8?

35 axb6 ♕xb6 36 a4 ♕b4 37 ♕e3 ♖f7 38 h4 ♗d7 39 ♘xd7!

Transformation of advantages! It is a bit sad to exchange this poor bishop, but it leads to a trivial win.

39...♖xd7 40 ♖xe6 ♕xa4 41 ♖e8+ ♔h7 42 ♕d3+ g6 43 ♖e6 ♖g7 44 h5 1-0

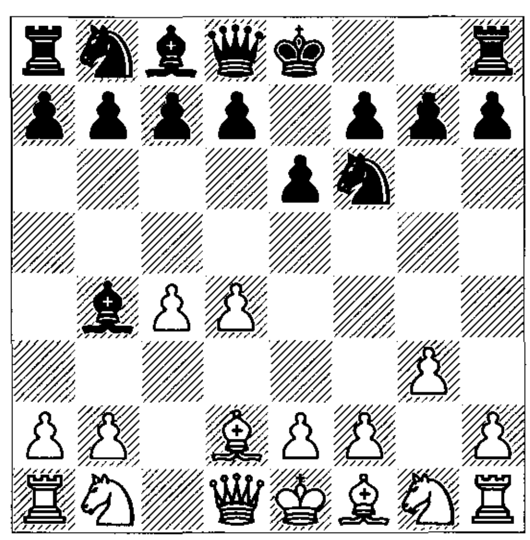
The Outpost

In *My System*, Nimzowitsch defines an *outpost* as "a piece, usually a knight, established on an open file in enemy territory, and protected (of course by a pawn). This knight, protected and supported as he is, will, in consequence of his radius of attack, exercise a disturbing influence, and will, therefore, cause the opponent to weaken his position". This notion too has been broadened somewhat in modern times to mean basically a knight on an advanced square. The influence of the knight on such an advanced square often lays the foundation for an effective strategy.

L.B. Hansen – Rozentalis
Copenhagen 1988

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 ♗b4+ 4 ♗d2 *(D)*

B



4...♗xd2+

Almost 20 years later, at the European Team Championship, Khersonisos 2007, Rozentalis chose 4...c5!? against me. This interesting move would probably have made the old masters from the Scientific School roll their eyes, as Black allows White a major pawn-centre. However, the move is a firm part of contemporary opening theory, and the game ended in a short

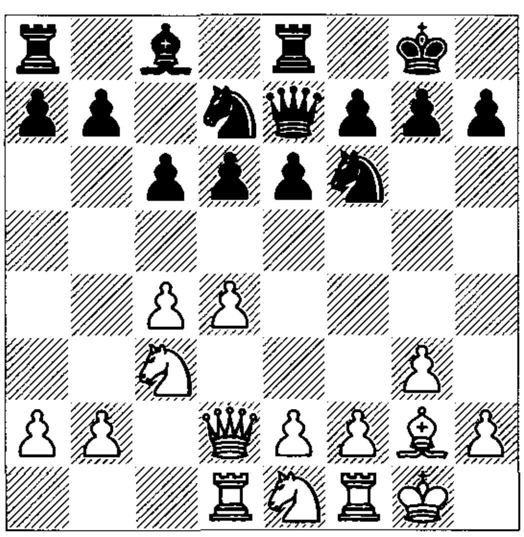
but entertaining draw after 5 ♗xb4 cxb4 6 ♗g2 0-0 7 e4 d6 8 ♘e2 e5 9 a3 bxa3 10 ♘xa3 ♘c6 11 ♕d2 exd4 12 ♖d1 ♕b6 13 ♘b5 ♘e5 14 ♕xd4 ♕a5+?! (here 14...♗h3! is better, with the points 15 ♗xh3? ♘f3+ or 15 ♕xb6? ♗xg2! and 16...♘f3#; 15 0-0 is better but in that case Black can force equality by 15...♗xg2 16 ♔xg2 ♕xd4 17 ♖xd4 ♘c6! 18 ♖xd6 ♘xe4, as indicated by Rozentalis) 15 ♕c3 ♕xc3+ 16 ♘exc3 ♗g4 (16...♘xc4 17 ♘xd6 is a bit better for White, as Black cannot take on b2 because of 18 ♖d2, trapping the knight) 17 ♖d4! ♘e8! 18 0-0 ½-½. White has just a small plus, as the knight has to return to a3 after 18...a6, since 19 ♘xd6 ♘xd6 20 ♖xd6 ♘xc4 is fine for Black.

5 ♕xd2 0-0 6 ♗g2 d6 7 ♘f3 ♕e7 8 ♘c3 c6?!

Perhaps premature. Four years later, Korchnoi played 8...e5 against me (European Team Ch, Debrecen 1992). After 9 0-0 ♗g4!? 10 d5 (10 ♘e1!? is still possible here) 10...a5 11 ♘e1 ♘a6 12 e4 c6 13 ♘d3 cxd5 14 cxd5 ♘d7!? 15 f3 ♗h5 16 ♘d1 ♘ac5 17 ♘xc5 ♘xc5 18 ♘e3 f6 White had a small pull but Black was solid. The game was eventually drawn.

9 ♖d1 ♘bd7 10 0-0 ♖e8 11 ♘e1!? *(D)*

B



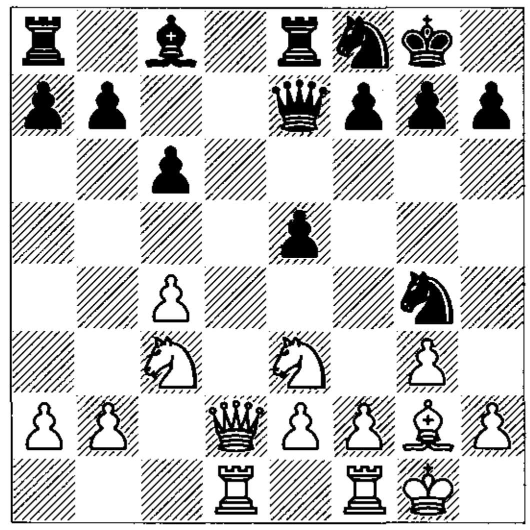
An interesting alternative to the more common e4 and d5 (after ...e5). White tries to exploit Black's move-order with the early ...c6. The idea is to play on the d-file and exploit the d6-square when the d-file is opened after Black's eventual ...e5. Notice that White was ready to change his plan after Black committed to ...c6. This is an important aspect of the transition from opening to middlegame. In the game against Korchnoi, the great old master postponed ...c6 until the centre was closed and thereby left White fewer options.

11...e5 12 ♘c2 ♘f8 13 ♘e3 ♘g4

Black could close the centre with 13...e4, but in that case the knight on e3 is perfectly placed as a *blockading knight*, and White can immediately initiate play on the queenside with 14 b4.

14 dxe5 dxe5 *(D)*

W



15 ♘e4!

Setting up an *outpost* on d6.

15...♗e6 16 ♘d6 ♖ed8 17 ♘xg4 ♗xg4 18 c5

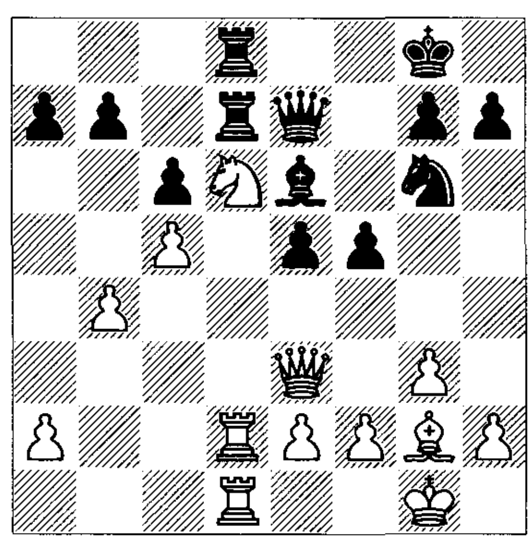
The outpost is supported by a pawn, as Nimzowitsch would have it.

18...♖d7 19 b4!

The second phase begins. White exploits the influence of the outpost by planning b5 with nagging pressure on the black queenside.

19...♖ad8 20 ♕e3 ♘g6 21 ♖d2 ♗e6 22 ♖fd1 f5?! *(D)*

W



Black makes an understandable attempt to undercut White's plan but it merely weakens his position.

23 f4! exf4

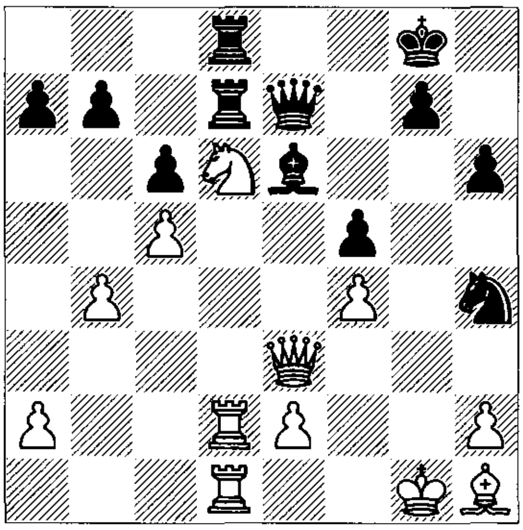
After 23...e4 24 ♗h3 Black has a hard time covering all his pawns. The knight makes threats forward (b7) as well as backward (f5)!

24 gxf4 ♘h4 25 ♗h1

The knight on h4 cannot do much on its own.

25...h6 *(D)*

W



26 b5!

Finally!

26...cxb5 27 ♗xb7 ♔h7?!

This loses material, but it was not easy for Black to find a good move. 27...♖xb7? loses to 28 ♘xb7 ♖xd2 29 ♖xd2 ♕xb7 30 ♕xe6+.

28 ♗c8! ♕f6 29 ♗xd7 ♖xd7 30 ♘xb5 ♖xd2 31 ♖xd2 ♕a1+ 32 ♔f2

Black's counterplay lacks sufficient punch.

32...♗xa2 33 ♕c3 ♕b1 34 ♖d7 1-0

Open Files

"The ideal which lies at the root of every operation in a file is the ultimate penetration by way of this file into the enemy's game, that is to say our (White's) 7th or 8th rank." – Nimzowitsch. That is what the strategic battle for open files is about in a nutshell! In practice of course things are usually much more complicated, but the end goal is clear: to penetrate deep into the enemy position with a rook. Obviously this theme is mainly seen in the endgame but it is surprisingly often a key theme in middlegame strategy as well.

L.B. Hansen – Matthiesen
Danish Ch, Aalborg 2007

1 d4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 c4 dxc4 4 e3 e6 5 ♗xc4 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 b3

This innocuous-looking move should not be underestimated, although it is obviously not the most critical line against the Queen's Gambit Accepted.

7...cxd4 8 ♘xd4 ♗d6!?

This move, in connection with the 10th and 11th moves, initiates the positionally well-founded plan of exchanging the dark-squared bishops. However, at the same time Black is dangerously behind in development – one of Nimzowitsch's elements which actually does not differ very much from the previous recommendation of the Scientific School – and the question is therefore whether Black can catch up in development before White can build any tangible initiative.

9 ♗b2 0-0 10 ♘d2 ♕e7 11 ♕f3!?

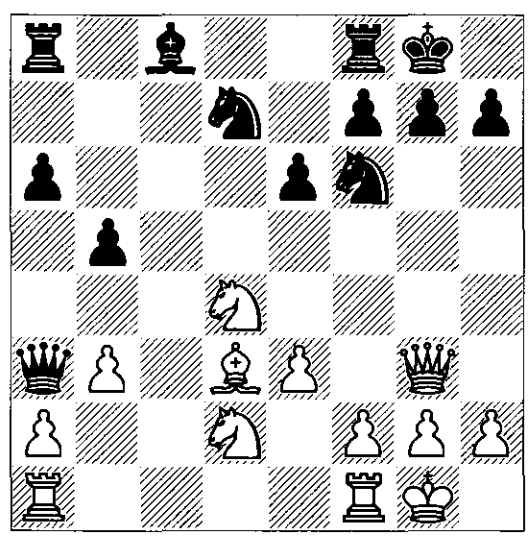
An alternative was 11 ♗d3 in order to free c4 for the knight.

11...♗a3

11...b5!? is possible, as 12 ♕xa8?! ♗b7 13 ♕a7 ♗c5 traps the queen (14 ♗a3 ♗xa3 with the double threat of 15...♗c5 and 15...bxc4 does not help much). I intended to play 12 ♗d3 ♗b7 13 ♕h3 with some prospects of a kingside attack, but Black is solid.

12 ♗xa3 ♕xa3 13 ♗d3 ♘bd7 14 ♕g3 b5 *(D)*

W



Black is only one move – 15...♗b7 – from completing his development. White must act fast.

15 ♗e4!

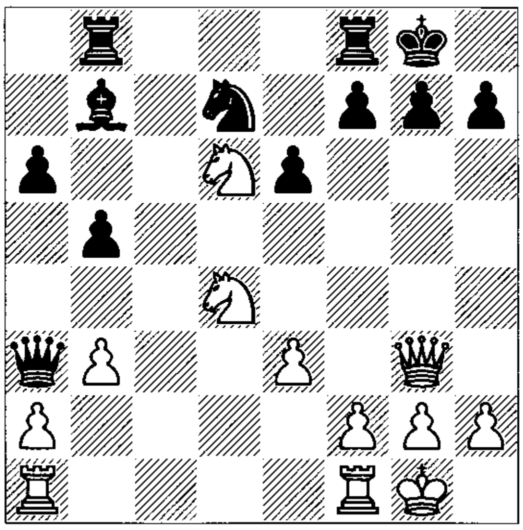
A strong positional move based on the idea of an *outpost* on d6.

15...♘xe4

Black could contemplate 15...♖b8!?, as 16 ♘c6 ♖b6 leads nowhere. Instead White should play 16 ♕c7! ♘e8 (16...♕c5 17 ♖fc1) 17 ♕c1 ♕xc1 18 ♖fxc1 with some pressure in the endgame.

16 ♘xe4 ♗b7 17 ♘d6 ♖ab8 *(D)*

W



18 ♖ac1

Play now revolves around the *open files*. Since White is first on the c-file, he can claim an advantage. The threat is 19 ♖c7, so Black's reply is virtually forced.

18...♕a5 19 ♖fd1!

White takes possession of the other open file on the board and introduces a small threat: 20 ♘4f5! exf5 21 ♘xf5 g6 22 ♖xd7.

19...♕b6!

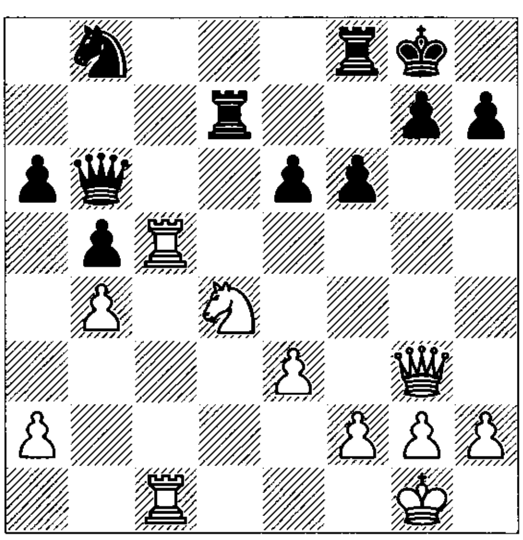
Meeting the above-mentioned threat since now Black would win a piece after 20 ♘4f5? exf5 21 ♘xf5 ♕f6!.

20 ♘xb7! ♖xb7 21 b4!

With the last two moves White's strategic plan becomes clear: he wants to exploit his command of the open c-file to penetrate Black's position. As Nimzowitsch stated, the objective is straightforward: to penetrate the seventh or eighth rank.

21...♘b8 22 ♖c5! ♖d7 23 ♖dc1 f6 *(D)*

W



24 ♖c8?!

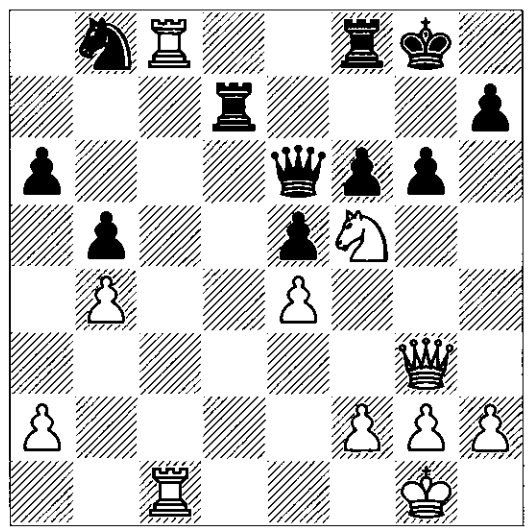
This looks strong and is in accordance with Nimzowitsch's theories. However, here another of Nimzo's elements should take precedence: it was stronger first to *restrain* Black's counterplay with 24 f4!.

24...e5 25 ♘f5 g6 26 e4!

This introduces the deadly threat of 27 ♕b3+, and in my calculations I had expected Black's next move to be forced. With little time left, so apparently did Matthiesen. However, as the computer calmly points out, Black could play 26...♖xc8! 27 ♖xc8+ ♖d8!, and White has nothing better than 28 ♘e7+ (28 ♕b3+ ♔f8) 28...♔g7 29 ♖xd8 ♕xd8 30 ♘d5 ♘c6, when White's advantage is nowhere as prevalent as it would have been after 24 f4.

26...♕e6? *(D)*

W

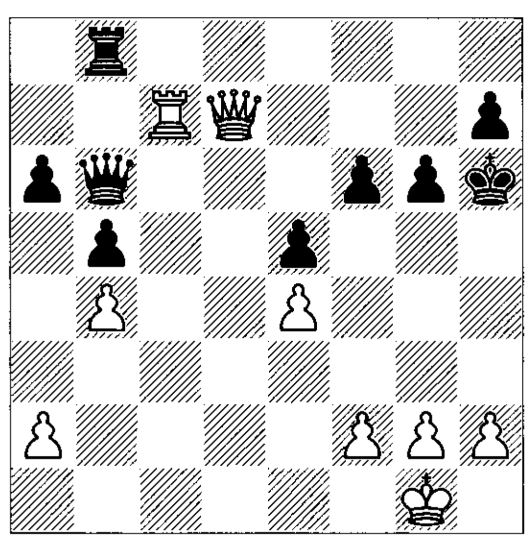


27 ♕g4!

Now Black is defenceless. The threat is 28 ♘h6+, and 27...♕xa2 loses to 28 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 29 ♕h4!, and the threat of 30 ♕xf6+ in combination with ♖c8+ is decisive.

27...♕b6 28 ♘h6+ ♔g7 29 ♖xb8! ♖xb8 30 ♕xd7+ ♔xh6 31 ♖c7 *(D)*

B



The climax of the white strategy of play on the open files.

31...♕d4

After 31...♔g5 White has a choice of mates, including 32 ♕d2+ ♔g4 33 h3+ ♔h5 34 ♖xh7#.

32 ♕h3+! ♔g5 33 ♕g3+ ♔h6 34 ♕h4# (1-0)

In a game from the beginning of my career I was myself taught a lesson about the importance of possessing open files from one of the best players in chess history.

Karpov – L.B. Hansen
Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 b6 3 g3 c5 4 ♗g2 ♗b7 5 0-0 e6

At this point of my career I was very fond of the Hedgehog structure – pawns on a6, b6, d6 and e6. Its flexibility and dynamic counterattacking prospects – ...b5 or ...d5 – appealed to me. In recent years, however, I have come to appreciate White's superior space more, and so I have tended to prefer the white side of such positions. This is an interesting scenario: that over time a player may alter his understanding and evaluation of certain types of positions. It has nothing to do with specific variations in the Hedgehog; rather the change is grounded in general considerations regarding space vs dynamism. I have noticed a similar development in my perception of positions with an isolated d-pawn but here the trend is opposite. Early in my career I very much liked playing *against* an isolated d-pawn, whereas later I did not mind playing *with* it. That is, in such positions I now value dynamism over structural considerations. I guess that as your experience grows, your perception of chess changes.

6 ♘c3 a6 7 b3 ♗e7

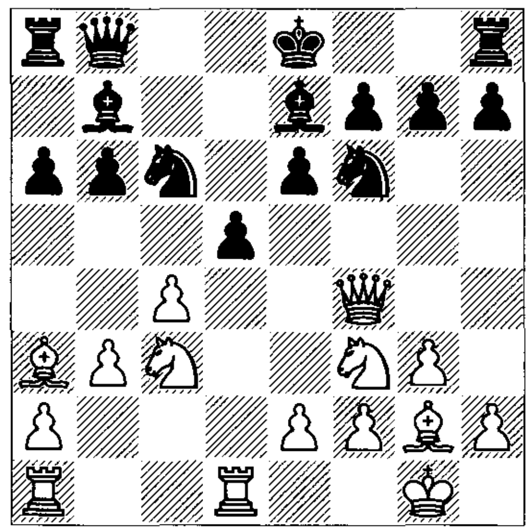
There are some interesting move-order issues here. For some time my move-order was considered imprecise as Black will now have to develop the knight to c6 rather than d7, which is the normal square for the knight in the Hedgehog. Therefore 7...d6 was recommended here, to have time for ...♘bd7-c5 if White develops his bishop to a3. However, in recent years a number of games have shown that the move-order with the knight on c6 is pretty safe too, if Black plays accurately.

8 d4 cxd4 9 ♕xd4 d6 10 ♗a3 ♘c6 11 ♕f4 ♕b8?!

But this is inaccurate. 11...♕c7 is correct. This was played by Karpov himself in a rapid game versus Gelfand, Cap d'Agde 1998, in which White was only marginally better after 12 ♖fd1 ♖d8 13 ♖ac1 ♘a7! (necessary prophylaxis against the threat of 14 ♘d5!) 14 e4 (in L.B.Hansen-S.B.Hansen, Danish Ch, Esbjerg 1997, I played the more modest 14 h3 here and did not achieve much after 14...0-0 15 ♕e3 ♘c8 16 ♗b2 ♖fe8 17 ♘d4 ♗xg2 18 ♔xg2 ♘a7 19 ♕f3) 14...0-0 15 ♕e3 ♘d7 16 e5 ♘c5 17 b4 ♘d7 18 exd6 ♗xd6 19 ♘e4 ♗e7.

12 ♖fd1 d5!? *(D)*

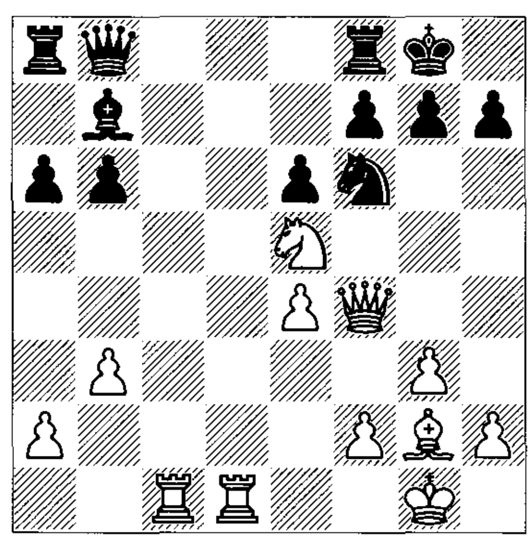
W



This was my idea. Now the centre is cleared but White retains a solid plus because of his eventual control over the open files in the centre.

13 ♗xe7 ♘xe7 14 ♘e5 0-0 15 cxd5 ♘exd5 16 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 17 e4 ♗b7 18 ♖ac1 *(D)*

B



An instructive position. After the game Karpov was of the opinion that Black is already lost here. The key to the position is the two *open files*, firmly in White's hands. My next move is a blunder; I simply missed White's 20th move. However, it is difficult to find a good move for

Black. In a game Nogueiras-R.Leyva, Cuban Ch, Las Tunas 2001, Black did manage to hold after 18...b5 19 ♘d7 (White has other options, such as 19 h3 with the idea 20 g4) 19...♕xf4 20 gxf4 ♖fc8 21 ♖xc8+ ♖xc8 22 ♘c5! ♗c6 23 b4, although White is certainly for choice here.

18...♖d8? 19 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 20 ♘xf7!

Ouch! 20...♔xf7 is met by 21 ♖c7+.

20...♕d4 21 ♕d6! ♕b2 22 ♖f1 ♖e8 23 ♕c7! ♗a8

23...♗xe4 24 ♘d6 ♗xg2 25 ♕f7+ ♔h8 26 ♘xe8 and White wins.

24 ♘g5 h6 25 ♕f7+ ♔h8 26 e5! 1-0

26...♕xe5 is met by 27 ♕xe8+! ♘xe8 28 ♘f7+.

Nimzowitsch emphasized that the objective of play on an open file is to penetrate to the seventh or eighth rank. The dream scenario is to be able to double rooks on the seventh. Usually this happens late in the game – but sometimes it is possible shortly after the opening!

L.B. Hansen – Sevillano
Agoura Hills 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 c4 e6 4 g3 dxc4 5 ♕a4+

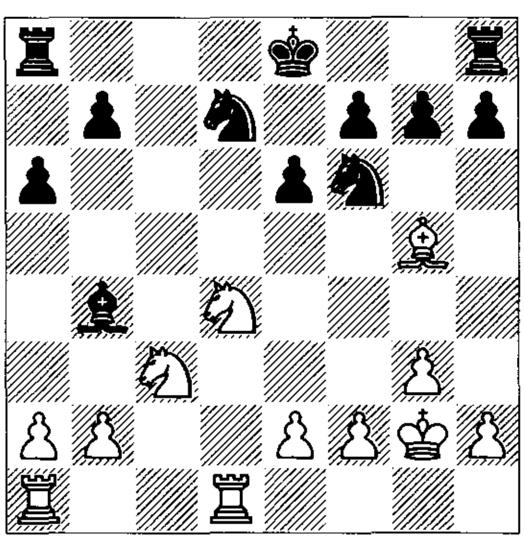
This line in the Catalan does not promise White much. 5 ♗g2 is more critical.

5...♗d7 6 ♕xc4 ♗c6 7 ♗g2 ♗d5 8 ♕d3 ♗e4 9 ♕d1 c5 10 ♘c3 ♗c6 11 0-0 cxd4 12 ♕xd4 ♕xd4 13 ♘xd4 ♗xg2 14 ♔xg2 a6 15 ♗g5 ♘bd7 16 ♖fd1?!

16 ♖ac1 is more prudent.

16...♗b4! *(D)*

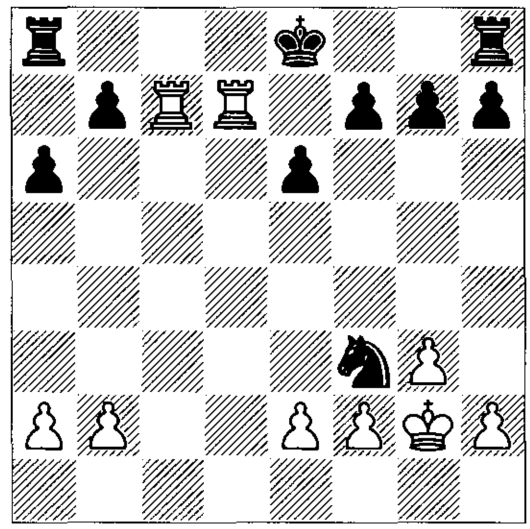
W



I have played the opening somewhat sloppily, and Black is fine. The cautious move is 17 ♗xf6 but after 17...♘xf6 White can hardly hope to generate any play. However, then I hit upon an interesting idea – to sacrifice a piece to be able to double on the seventh!

17 ♖ac1!? ♗xc3 18 ♖xc3 ♘e4 19 ♖c7! ♘xg5 20 ♘f3! ♘xf3 21 ♖dxd7 *(D)*

B



There it is! However, White has no more than sufficient compensation for the piece.

21...♘e5 22 ♖e7+ ♔d8 23 f4! ♖e8!

The safest choice. If the knight moves, White starts collecting pawns on the seventh rank. Now, on the other hand, the game peters out in a draw.

24 ♖xe8+ ♔xe8 25 fxe5 b5 26 ♔f3 ♖d8 27 ♖c6 ½-½

27...♖d2 is an easy draw.

The Pawn-Chain and Passed Pawns

The concept of the pawn-chain can be traced back long before Nimzowitsch – to Philidor at the end of the 18th century. The Frenchman was the forerunner of the modern interpretation of the importance of pawns with his legendary adage "the pawn is the soul of chess".

But Philidor was too much ahead of his time – the players of the Romantic School did not understand the depth of his ideas, and we had to wait for Steinitz almost a century later, before Philidor's ideas were integrated into a coherent chess strategy framework.

Nimzowitsch's contribution to the understanding of pawn-chains was related to his concepts of prophylaxis and overprotection. Important pawns (and squares) should be prophylactically overprotected, so as to free the

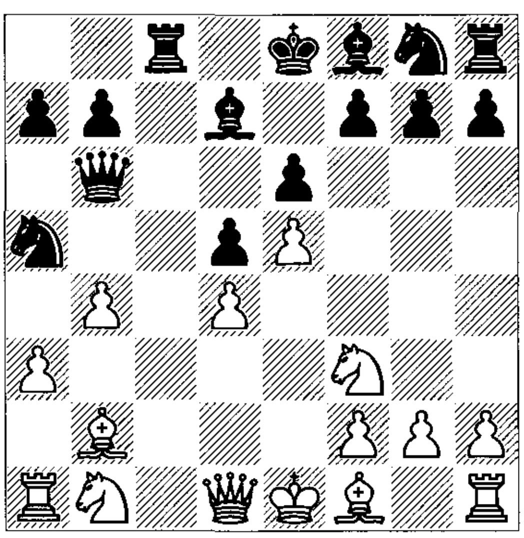
pieces for action, as described above. Nimzowitsch also showed the chess world that pawn-chains should be attacked at their base, rather than from the front.

In 1986, at the age of 17, I participated in my first World Junior Championship. I only scored 50% but I learned a lot. I remember being impressed by the following game, which was to decide the World Junior Championship. The Cuban Walter Arencibia won the game and the championship, ahead of names such as Anand (who won the following year), Bareev and Agdestein. Notice the battle between the two pawn-chains.

Klinger – Arencibia
World Junior Ch, Gausdal 1986

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 ♘f3 ♘c6 5 c3 ♕b6 6 a3 ♗d7 7 b4 cxd4 8 cxd4 ♖c8 9 ♗b2 ♘a5!? *(D)*

W

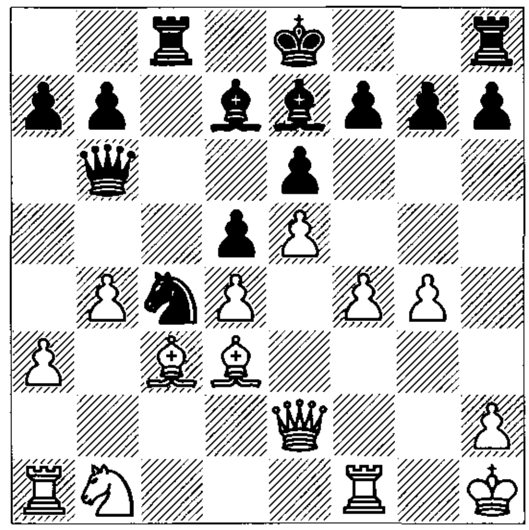


10 ♗c3?!

This interesting line in the Advance French is still occasionally seen, but nowadays White prefers 10 ♘bd2. A sample game that I watched live is this one – it was played in the German Bundesliga, where I played in the same team as Fressinet. Our team, Lübecker SV, won the title three years running in the early 2000s: 10...♘c4 11 ♘xc4 dxc4 12 ♖c1 a5 13 ♘d2 axb4 14 ♘xc4 ♕d8 15 a4! ♗c6 16 a5 ♗e7 17 ♘b6 ♖c7 18 d5! exd5 19 ♗d3 ♗g5 20 ♖c2 ♘e7 21 0-0 ♗h6 22 ♗d4 0-0 23 ♕b1 ♖e8 24 f4 g6 25 ♕xb4 with a large advantage for White, Fressinet-B.Socko, Bundesliga 2002/3.

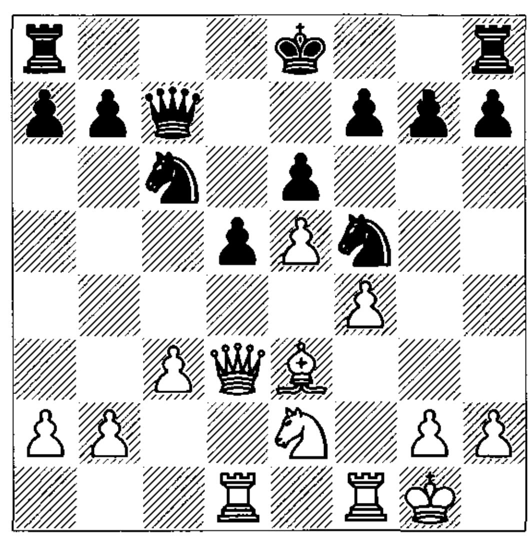
10...♘c4 11 ♗d3 ♗e7 12 0-0 ♘h6 13 ♕e2 ♘f5 14 g4 ♘h4 15 ♘xh4 ♗xh4 16 ♔h1 ♗e7 17 f4 *(D)*

B



Let us delve a little into this position, and more specifically the pawn-structure in the centre. Both sides have pawn-chains – a typical feature of closed positions. Nimzowitsch prescribed that in such circumstances one should try to attack *the base* of the enemy pawn-chain. For Black, that means exerting pressure on White's d4-pawn. For White, it means making the f5 advance to target Black's e6-pawn. In the next few moves we see this battle unfolding. Black initially attempts to restrain White's kingside advance as in a famous game:

B



Nimzowitsch – Capablanca
New York 1927

15...g6! 16 g4? (a classic and somewhat incomprehensible mistake by the great positional master; correct was 16 ♗f2 h5 17 g3 followed by a slow build-up with h3 and eventually g4 and f5 – in that case White would maintain level chances) 16...♘xe3 17 ♕xe3 h5! 18 g5 (as 18 h3 hxg4 19 hxg4 0-0-0, followed by doubling rooks on the h-file, does not look appealing) 18...0-0 with advantage for Black as White has no activity.

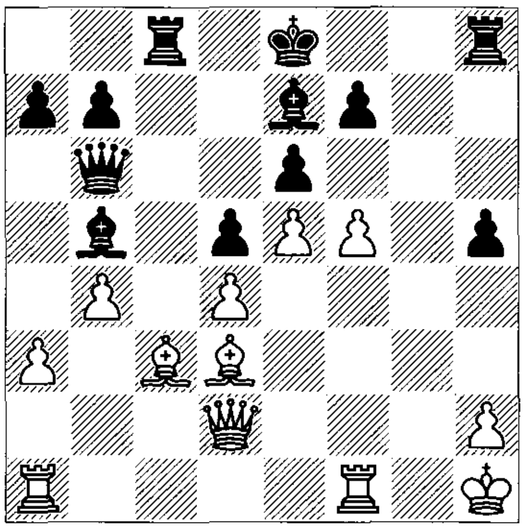
Back to Klinger-Arencibia...

17...g6 18 ♘d2 h5 19 f5!

Compared to the game Nimzowitsch-Capablanca, White is better positioned to carry out this thrust.

19...gxf5 20 gxf5 ♘xd2 21 ♕xd2 ♗b5! *(D)*

W



This secures the favourable exchange of the light-squared bishops. White then remains with a 'bad bishop', and furthermore Black will have an easier time attacking White's base pawn on d4, as he can use the c4-square for the attack.

22 f6?

In my view this is an instructive conceptual mistake. White gains space and in Nimzowitsch's terminology shifts the point of attack from e6 to f7, which is now Black's base pawn. However, the problem is that *White cannot really attack that base pawn.* It is much easier to attack e6. Therefore something like 22 fxe6 fxe6 23 ♖g1 followed by 24 ♖g6 or 24 ♖g7 was undoubtedly better, after which White is fine. In the game, on the other hand, he ends up worse.

22...♗f8 23 ♖g1 ♕a6 24 ♗xb5+ ♕xb5 25 ♖g3 ♕c4!

The benefit of the exchange of the light-squared bishops.

26 ♕b2 h4 27 ♖f3 ♖g8 28 ♖g1 ♖xg1+ 29 ♔xg1 ♗h6 30 ♔g2 b5?!

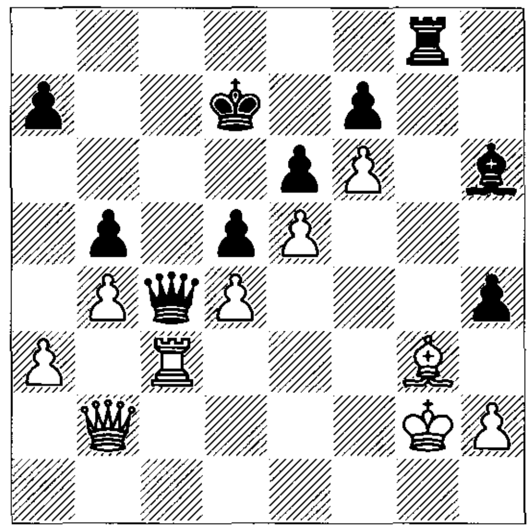
A positionally well-founded move: Black blockades even more white pawns on dark squares. However, the direct 30...♔d7 was probably even better, followed by 31...♖g8+ with play against White's king. Notice that the black king is perfectly safe as White cannot get at the f7-pawn.

31 ♗e1 ♔d7! 32 ♖c3?

White succumbs to the pressure. Remember that this game decided the World Junior Championship! Correct was 32 ♗xh4, although Black is still better after 32...♗c1! 33 ♕f2 ♖g8+ 34 ♗g3 (34 ♖g3 costs White either the a3- or d4-pawn after the rook exchange, but 34 ♔h3!? is possible, although the king is exposed here) 34...♖g4!, and the base pawn on d4 falls.

32...♖g8+ 33 ♗g3! *(D)*

B



White's idea is that now 33...♕xd4? loses the queen due to 34 ♖c7+. But...

33...h3+!

Ouch! If the king goes to a dark square, d4 falls with check with fatal consequences, and 34 ♔xh3 ♕f1+ 35 ♕g2 ♕f5+ mates.

34 ♔f3 ♕f1+ 35 ♕f2 ♕d1+ 36 ♕e2 ♖xg3+!

The last important point: the h-pawn queens.

37 hxg3 ♕xe2+ 0-1

In the same year, I had an opportunity to exploit Nimzowitsch's teachings about attacking the base pawn.

M.S. Hansen – L.B. Hansen

Danish Junior Ch, Albertslund 1986

White is my good friend Mads Smith Hansen, now a correspondence IM and former team captain of the Danish Olympiad Team. When Mads and I graduated from high school in 1987, we took a year off to tour Europe and play a lot of chess tournaments. During that year my Elo rating shot up from around 2350 to just below 2500, I earned the IM title and for the first time seriously came to believe that I could become a GM, which I achieved three years later.

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4

The Winawer Variation of the French Defence has been a loyal companion to me throughout my career.

4 e5 b6!?

The normal line goes 4...c5 5 a3, after which I have played both 5...♗xc3+ and 5...♗a5.

5 ♗d2 ♕d7 6 ♕g4 ♗f8!?

This seemingly paradoxical set-up is not without venom. Black intends to exchange his bad light-squared bishop while not allowing any weaknesses in his position. Thus he refrains from 6...♔f8 or 6...g6.

7 ♘d1!? ♗a6 8 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 9 f4?!

This is conceptually correct but probably premature, as White neglects getting his king into safety. More prudent was 9 ♕e2 followed by 10 ♘f3 and 11 0-0.

9...c5!

Attacking the base pawn as stated in Nimzowitsch's theory.

10 ♘f3 ♘h6! 11 ♕h3 ♘f5 12 c3 cxd4 13 ♘xd4?!

Perhaps White should take with the c-pawn, to preserve the possibility of gaining a tempo on Black's knight with g4. As in the game, Black would reply 13...♘b4.

13...♘xd4 14 cxd4 ♘b4!

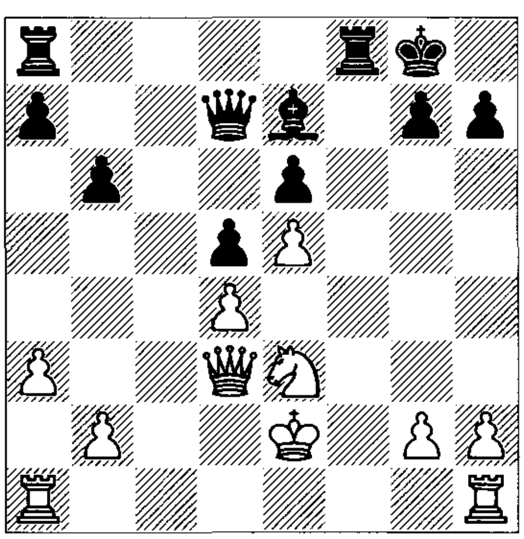
This move allows White to exchange his bad bishop, but in return the white king gets stuck in the centre.

15 ♗xb4 ♗xb4+ 16 ♔e2 0-0 17 ♕d3 f6!

For now Black attacks the front of the pawn-chain in order to get to White's exposed king.

18 a3 ♗e7 19 ♘e3 fxe5 20 fxe5 *(D)*

B



20...♖f4!

Striking directly at the base of the pawn-chain. The rook will be excellently placed on e4. In *My System*, Nimzowitsch called this kind of manoeuvre "a restricted advance on one file with the idea of giving up that file for another one." With all Black's pieces joining the assault on the exposed king, White quickly succumbs.

21 g3 ♖e4 22 h4 ♕a4!

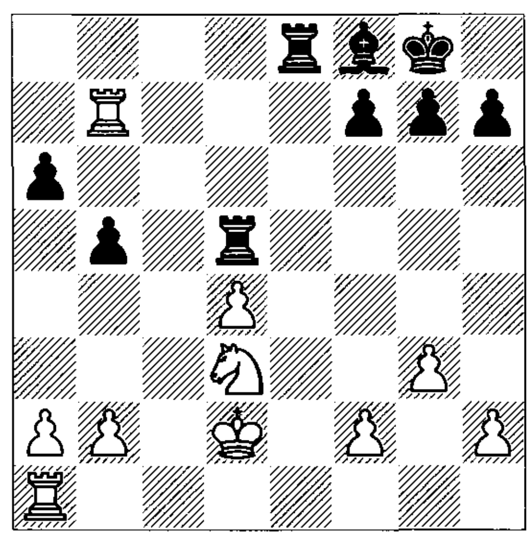
More pressure on the base pawn.

23 ♖ad1 ♖f8 24 ♖d2 ♕e8 25 ♔e1 ♖f3 26 ♖e2 ♕g6 27 ♔d2 ♕xg3 0-1

Nimzowitsch wrote extensively about the passed pawn. In *My System*, he coined the now legendary phrases "the passed pawn is a criminal, who should be kept under lock and key" and "the free passed pawn is such a dangerous 'criminal', that it is by no means sufficient to keep him under police supervision; the fellow must be put in prison." In other words, a passed pawn must be blockaded; it is not enough just to keep it under observation as the pawn has an inherent 'lust' to advance that must be prohibited.

Vladimir Kramnik is probably the player in contemporary chess who is most skilled at pushing passed pawns through to promotion. This theme is prevalent in numerous of his games.

W



Kramnik – Naiditsch
Dortmund 2007

White is momentarily a pawn up but it seems that Black is going to regain his pawn on d4. Kramnik finds an ingenious way to proceed: he sacrifices a piece to get two strong passed pawns that Black must play extremely resourcefully to control. In the game, the practical difficulties prove too much for Naiditsch.

29 a4! ♖xd4 30 axb5! ♖ed8

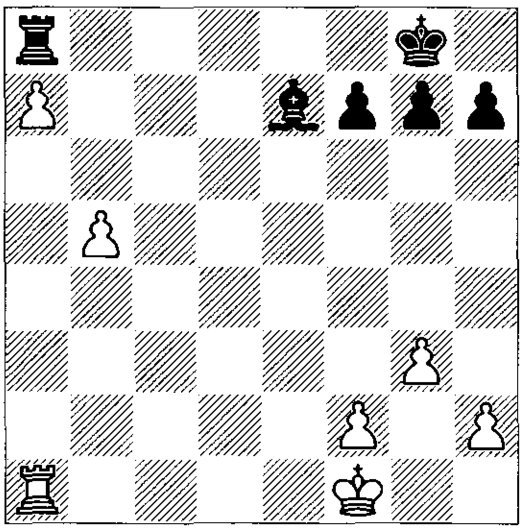
Black could reject the piece by 30...axb5 but after 31 ♖xb5 ♖ed8 32 ♖b3 he is just a pawn down with no compensation.

31 bxa6 ♖xd3+ 32 ♔e1 ♖e8+ 33 ♔f1 ♖dd8 34 a7 ♖a8 35 b4!

There comes the second one!

35...♖e7 36 ♖xe7 ♗xe7 37 b5 *(D)*

B



We have reached the crucial point in the game. With the pawn on h6 instead of h7, the game would be an easy draw, but as it is, Black needs to be accurate, as his back rank is highly sensitive.

37...♗c5?

The decisive mistake. Now the bishop ends up on the wrong diagonal; the a5-d8 diagonal is the better one, as it is more difficult for the white rook to harass the bishop there. Black could still have drawn by 37...♗d8! 38 ♖d1 ♗c7! (38...♔f8?? loses to 39 ♖xd8+! ♖xd8 40 b6, while 38...♗b6? 39 ♖d6! is similar to the game continuation) 39 ♖c1 (not 39 ♖d7? ♖xa7) 39...♗a5!? (or simply 39...♗d8), when he is in time to free his king after 40 ♖c6 ♔f8 41 ♖a6 (or 41 b6 ♗xb6 42 ♖xb6 ♖xa7) 41...♗d8 42 b6 (there is nothing better) 42...♗xb6 43 ♖xb6 ♖xa7, with a draw.

38 ♖c1! ♗d4 39 ♖c4! ♗xa7 40 ♖a4! ♖b8 41 ♖xa7 ♔f8

A sad necessity – the pawn cannot be taken because of the back-rank mate. However, the rook endgame is lost.

42 ♖a5 ♔e7 43 ♔e2 ♖b6?!

Perhaps better defensive chances were offered by 43...♔d6 44 ♔d3 ♔c5 45 ♖a7! ♖f8 46 ♖b7, but White should win given the black rook's passive placement. In rook endings, rook activity is vital.

44 ♔d3 ♖d6+ 45 ♔c4 ♖d2 46 b6!

Now the passed b-pawn decides the game.

46...♔d6 47 ♖b5! ♖c2+ 48 ♔d4 1-0

48...♖c8 49 b7 ♖b8 50 ♖b6+ ♔c7 51 ♔c5 is lost for Black. The white king either penetrates to a7 or feasts upon Black's kingside pawns.

L.B. Hansen – Muir

European Team Ch, Gothenburg 2005

1 c4 e6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 g3 ♘f6 4 d4 ♗b4+ 5 ♗d2 ♗e7 6 ♗g2 0-0 7 0-0 c6 8 ♕b3!?

I have had good results with this move, which is comparatively less often seen than 8 ♕c2. White can also dispense with a queen move altogether. In the high-level encounter Ponomariov-Topalov, Sofia 2005 White emerged slightly better after 8 ♗f4 b6 9 ♘c3 ♗a6 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 ♖c1 ♘c6 12 ♘xd5!? ♕xd5 13 ♘e5 ♘xd4! 14 ♗xd5 ♘xe2+ 15 ♕xe2! ♗xe2 16 ♗xa8 ♖xa8 17 ♖fe1.

8...b6 9 ♘c3 ♗a6 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 ♖fc1

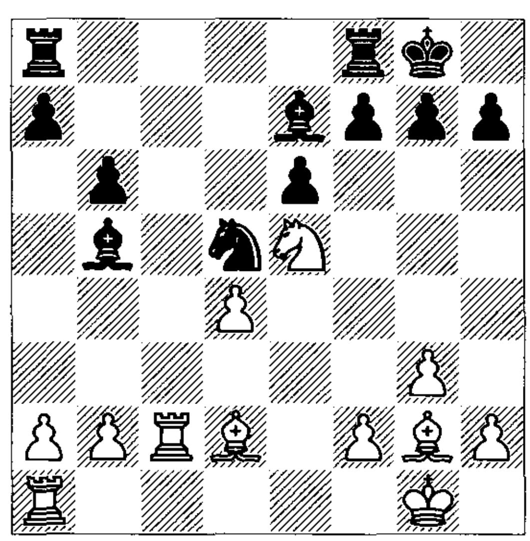
The alternative is 11 ♘e5, with which I have fond memories from L.B.Hansen-M.Gurevich, Wijk aan Zee 1993: 11...♗b7 12 ♗f4 ♘fd7 13 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 14 ♖fd1 ♘c6 15 e4 ♘a5 16 ♕c2 ♖ac8 17 exd5 ♗xd5 18 ♗xd5 exd5 19 ♕e2 ♗b4 20 ♕b5! ♘c6? (after 20...♕xb5 21 ♘xb5 White only has a symbolic advantage; I don't know what Gurevich missed when he gave up the d5-pawn) 21 ♕xd5 ♕g4 22 ♕g2 ♖fd8 23 d5 ♘e7 24 h3 ♕f5 25 d6 ♗xc3? (this loses; Black is not in time to pick up the e7-pawn because of a little tactical trick) 26 dxe7 ♖xd1+ 27 ♖xd1 ♗f6 28 ♖e1 ♕d7 29 ♕b7! 1-0.

11...♘c6 12 ♘xd5!?

A similar liquidation as in Ponomariov-Topalov above, albeit less spectacular.

12...♕xd5 13 ♕xd5 ♘xd5 14 ♖xc6 ♗xe2 15 ♘e5 ♗b5 16 ♖c2 *(D)*

B



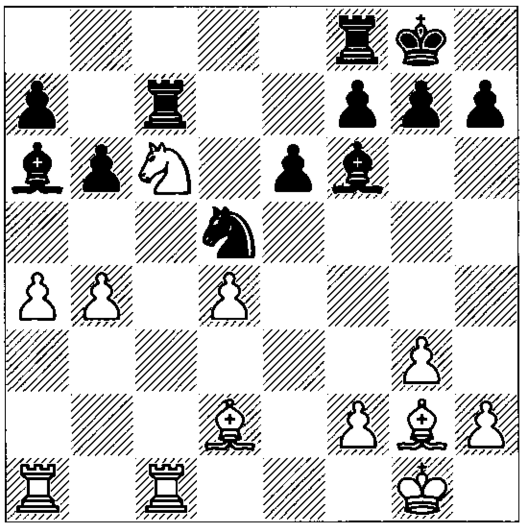
White has accepted an isolated d-pawn but in return controls the c-file and chances to build an outpost on c6.

16...♗a4?!

This plays into White's hands.

17 b3 ♗b5 18 a4 ♗a6 19 b4! ♖ac8 20 ♘c6 ♗f6 21 ♖cc1 ♖c7 *(D)*

W



22 ♗xd5!

Another liquidation, this time one that leads to a strong *passed pawn* on the c-file for White.

22...exd5 23 ♗f4 ♖cc8

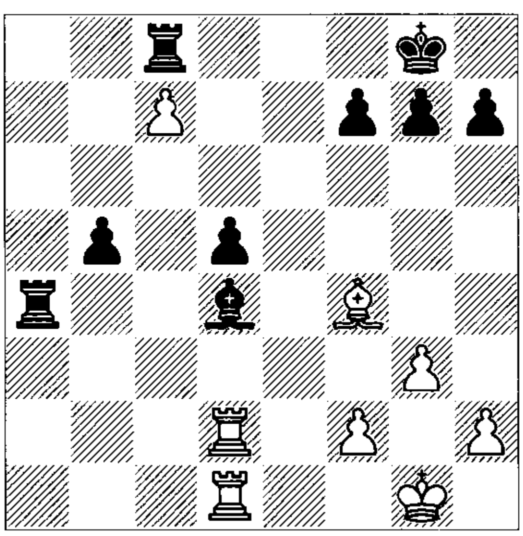
Neither 23...♖b7 24 b5 nor 23...♖d7? 24 ♘b8! works for Black.

24 b5 ♗b7 25 ♘xa7 ♖a8 26 ♘c6 ♗xc6

Otherwise Black is just a pawn down for nothing.

27 bxc6 ♗xd4 28 ♖a2 b5 29 ♖d2! ♖xa4 30 c7 ♖c8 31 ♖cd1 *(D)*

B



The white c-pawn is a monster. Similarly to the Kramnik-Anand game above, one of Black's problems is a lack of *luft* for his king. Muir's next move tries to solve this problem, but in vain.

31...g5?! 32 ♗xg5 ♗b6 33 ♖xd5 ♖xc7

This loses a piece but 33...♗xc7 34 ♖c1! ♖c4 35 ♖xc4 bxc4 36 ♖c5! is no improvement.

34 ♖d8+ ♔g7 35 ♖8d6! ♗c5 36 ♗h6+ 1-0

As I discussed in *Secrets of Chess Endgame Strategy*, mating attacks are a surprisingly common occurrence even in endgames!

Exchanging

Exchanging is one of the elements that Nimzowitsch does not spend too much space on in *My System*, yet it is of vital importance in chess. As Capablanca pointed out, and echoed by Nimzowitsch, exchanging is connected to the *transformation of advantages*. I discussed this concept in the previous chapter. Here I shall only give one example of the importance of making – or in this particular case *avoiding* – a particular exchange.

L.B. Hansen – Nikolić

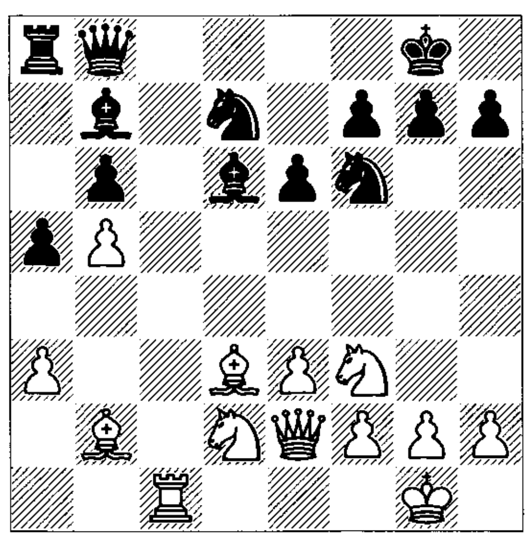
Wijk aan Zee 1995

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 ♘f3 a6 4 e3 ♘f6 5 ♗xc4 e6 6 0-0 c5 7 ♗d3!?

This is an interesting line which was quite popular in those years. The prophylactic idea is to dissuade Black from playing ...b5, which is strongly met by a4, gaining a good square on c4. In the old days White used to play 7 a4 or 7 ♕e2 here, while nowadays 7 ♗b3 has emerged as the main line.

7...♘bd7 8 ♕e2 b6 9 ♖d1 ♗b7 10 dxc5 ♗xc5 11 a3 ♕b8 12 ♘bd2 0-0 13 b4 ♗d6 14 ♗b2 ♖c8 15 ♖ac1 ♖xc1 16 ♖xc1 a5 17 b5 *(D)*

B

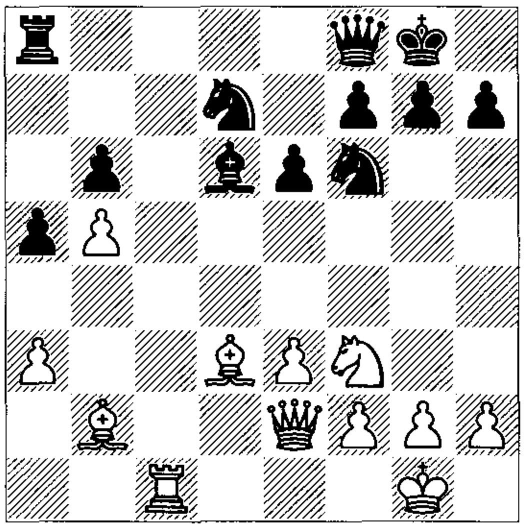


Both sides have developed calmly and the position is roughly equal. Nikolic's next move surprised me but it has a clever strategic idea behind it – which however does not work!

17...♗xf3?! 18 ♘xf3 ♕f8 *(D)*

Now Black's idea becomes visible: he plans 19 a4 ♗a3!, after which White remains with a somewhat bad light-squared bishop. However, White's next move refutes the idea.

W



19 ♖a1!

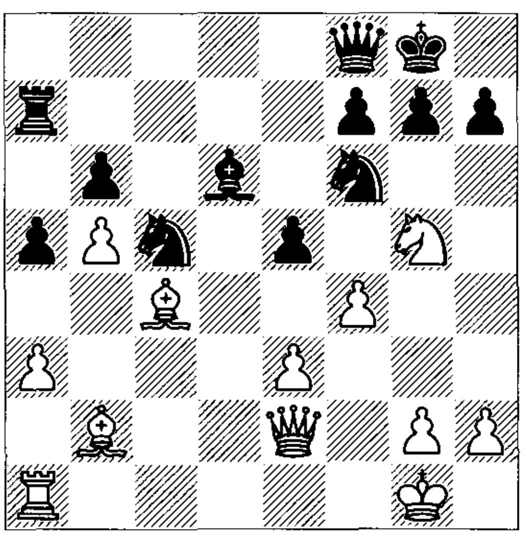
White momentarily pacifies his rook but it is much more important to prevent the *exchange* of the bishop on b2. Now White maintains the two bishops, and more importantly has a free hand to build an attack on the black king.

19...e5?!

Nikolic attempts to block the dark-squared bishop but leaves open space for the light-squared one, which has no counterpart.

20 ♘g5 ♘c5 21 ♗c4 ♖a7 22 f4! *(D)*

B



Opening all the diagonals towards the black king.

22...exf4 23 ♕c2! ♘cd7

Sadly forced, as 23...h6 loses to 24 ♘xf7 ♖xf7 25 ♗xf6 gxf6 26 ♕g6+.

24 ♘xf7 ♗c5 25 ♔h1 f3!?

An attempt to keep as many files as possible closed. Black cannot escape the discovered check, which can be given at White's leisure. Black will not last long after either 25...♗xe3 26 ♖d1 or 25...fxe3 26 ♖d1.

26 ♖f1!

Bringing the last piece into the attack. After 26...fxg2+ 27 ♕xg2 all White's pieces participate in the attack.

26...♗xe3 27 ♖xf3 ♕c5 28 ♘g5+ ♔h8 29 ♘e6 1-0

White wins a piece.

The Isolated d-Pawn

In *My System* and later again in *Chess Praxis*, Nimzowitsch devotes an entire chapter to the isolated d-pawn, pointing out the plans for the two sides in this type of position. In the great master's opinion, this is an important element in the understanding of positional play, since positions with isolated pawns can arise from a variety of openings.

In the early years of my career I very much liked playing against an isolated d-pawn. One of my main bastions as Black against 1 e4 was the Caro-Kann, and when faced with the Panov Attack I liked the following line, which I defended in a number of games with good results – in fact in my database I cannot find a single loss in my games with this line!

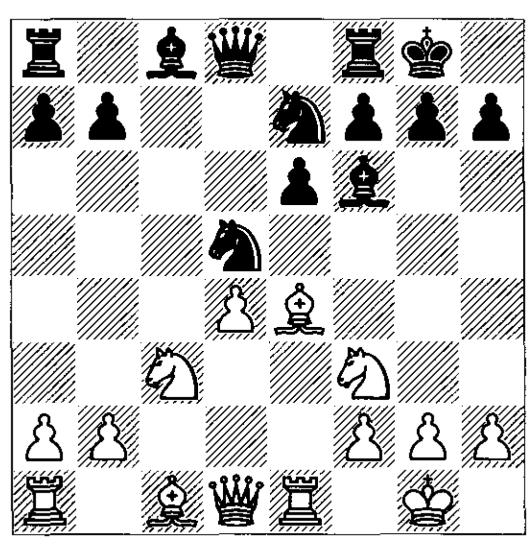
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♘f3 ♗e7 7 cxd5 ♘xd5

This position may occur from a number of different move-orders. Apart from the Caro-Kann one, I also sometimes reached this position from the English Opening, starting with 1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 c5 3 ♘f3 e6 4 e3.

8 ♗d3 ♘c6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖e1 ♗f6 11 ♗e4 ♘ce7 *(D)*

I also played the alternative 11...♕d6 in a few games but the text-move was my main choice.

W



Black's idea – as taught by Nimzowitsch – is first to *restrain, then blockade and finally*

destroy the white d-pawn. To that end, Black intends to play ...b6 and ...♗b7, firmly holding the d5-square. White, on the other hand, has easy development, an outpost on e5 and attacking possibilities on the kingside as compensation for the structural weakness. I believed (and still do) that Black is fine in this line, and this assessment was borne out in a number of my games in practice.

My legendary countryman Bent Larsen has played a significant role in developing the theory of how to play against isolated pawns. Larsen refined Nimzowitsch's approach to such positions by coining the phrase "such pawns should not be blockaded, they should be encircled". In the following game, Larsen blockades *and* encircles the isolated pawn.

Larsen – Gheorghiu
Palma de Mallorca 1968

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 ♘c3 e6 4 e3 ♘c6 5 d4 d5 6 cxd5 exd5

In this position I usually take with the knight, transposing to the Panov Caro-Kann above after 7 ♗d3. However, White also has the additional possibility 7 ♗c4, an old favourite of Botvinnik's. An example is the classic game Botvinnik-Alekhine, AVRO tournament, Amsterdam 1938: 7...cxd4 8 exd4 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖e1 b6?! (since this game this move has been known to be inaccurate; Black should play either 10...♘f6 or 10...♗f6) 11 ♘xd5 exd5 12 ♗b5 ♗d7 13 ♕a4 ♘b8 14 ♗f4 ♗xb5 15 ♕xb5, and the future World Champion went on to convert his advantage against the then World Champion.

7 ♗e2 cxd4 8 ♘xd4 ♗d6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♘f3 a6 11 b3 ♗g4 12 ♗b2 ♖e8 13 h3 ♗h5 *(D)*

Both sides have developed normally, but now Larsen plays an interesting move that signifies his theory of *encirclement* of isolated pawns.

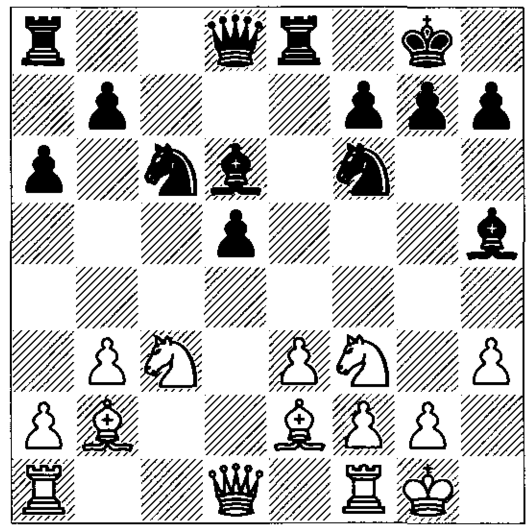
14 ♘h4!?

Usually the knight goes to d4 in such positions, but Larsen has other plans.

14...♗xe2 15 ♘xe2 ♗e5 16 ♕b1! ♘e4 17 ♘f3 ♗xb2 18 ♕xb2 ♕f6 19 ♕xf6 ♘xf6 20 ♖fd1 ♖ac8 21 ♖d2!

Notice that Larsen waits a very long time to *blockade* the d-pawn. His theory is much more

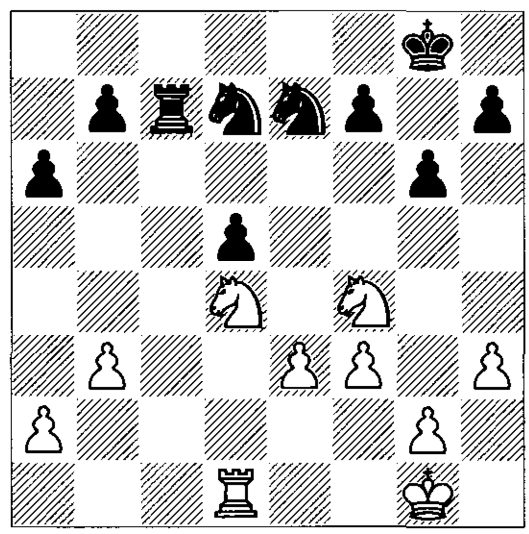
W



directly focused on the last of Nimzowitsch's three steps – restrain, blockade and destroy – without any intermediate steps!

21...♘e7 22 ♘fd4 ♘e4 23 ♖d3 ♖c7 24 f3 ♘c5 25 ♖c3 ♖ec8 26 ♘f4 ♘d7 27 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 28 ♖d1 g6 *(D)*

W



29 g4!

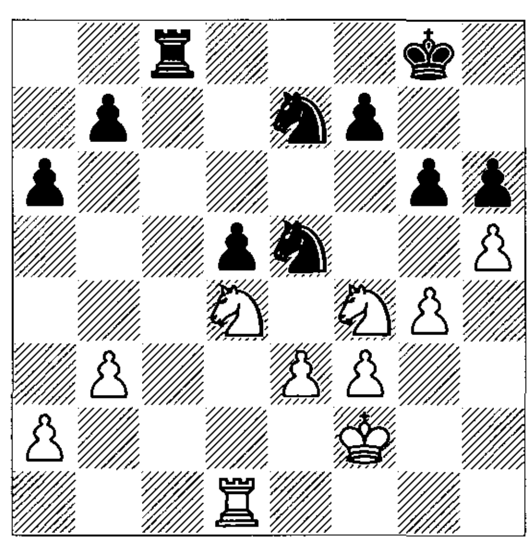
White prepares to open a second front, a typical theme in strategic endings; you usually need two weaknesses to win.

29...h6?

It is understandable that Black does not want to wait passively, but this merely aids White.

30 ♔f2 ♘e5 31 h4! ♖c8 32 h5! *(D)*

B



Now it becomes clear why Black should have left his pawn on h7. In that case 33 hxg6 would be less of a threat as Black could keep his defensive lines intact after 33...hxg6. However, now Black has to abandon either e6 or f5, which allows White to carry out his plan of encircling the d5-pawn.

32...♔g7 33 ♔e2 g5?

Presumably in time-pressure, Black blunders, but his position was difficult anyway. White may toy with ideas of ♖h1 followed by hxg6 and ♘fe6+, targeting the h6-pawn.

34 ♘xd5! ♘xd5 35 ♘f5+

The encirclement is complete!

35...♔h7 36 ♖xd5 ♖c2+?

Black blunders a piece but he was lost in any case.

37 ♔d1 1-0

Larsen won a lot of such games, and in my early years I was reluctant to accept an isolated pawn. However, in the early 1990s I gradually got to appreciate the dynamic features of an isolated d-pawn by studying masters of dynamic play – some of the players from the New Dynamism and Universality eras – and I started entering such positions frequently.

C. Hansen – L.B. Hansen

Wijk aan Zee 1993

My compatriot Curt Hansen has always been a difficult opponent for me. Curt is a few years older than me, and in his junior years he was European and World Junior Champion and was considered one of the greatest Western talents around. I have lost a number of games against Curt over the years, but in this game I managed to show the dynamic benefits of the isolated d-pawn.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♘f3 ♘bd7 6 ♕c2 ♗d6 7 ♗e2 0-0 8 0-0

A year later Curt and I continued our discussion on isolated-pawn positions in a game at Vejle 1994, in which Curt got the better of it after 8 b3 a6 9 ♗b2 e5 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 dxe5 ♘xe5 12 0-0 ♗e6 13 ♖ac1 ♘c6?! 14 ♕d1 ♖c8 15 ♘d4 ♕c7 16 g3 ♘xd4 17 ♕xd4 ♗e5 18 ♕b4! ♕b8 19 ♗f3. Some years later I improved on my own play with 13...♖c8! 14 ♕b1 ♘fg4! 15 g3 ♕f6 16 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 17 ♗xg4?! (this pawn-snatch turns out to be too risky given the weak light squares around the white king) 17...♗xg4 18 ♘xd5 ♕f3! 19 ♗xe5 ♕xd5 20 f4 ♗h3 21 ♖f2 ♖xc1+ 22 ♕xc1 ♖c8 23 ♕e1 ♕e4, and Black soon crashed through on the light squares in Holst-L.B.Hansen, Danish League 2001/2.

8...e5

I adopted the Semi-Slav in 1992 and it has remained the backbone of my defensive lines vs 1 d4 ever since. As part of the process I studied this line in which Black accepts an isolated d-pawn in return for classic dynamic piece-play.

9 cxd5 cxd5 10 ♘b5 ♗b8 11 dxe5 ♘xe5 12 ♗d2

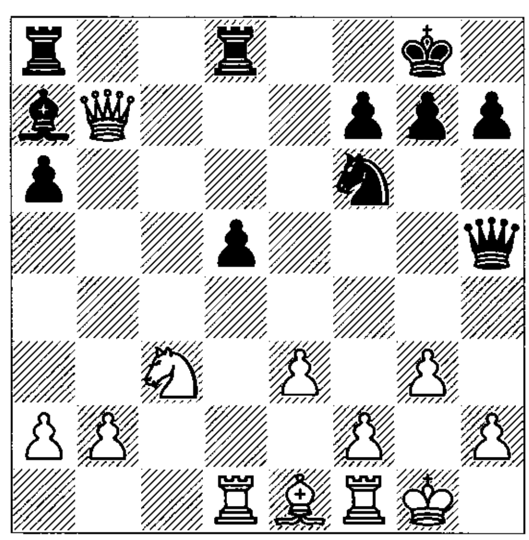
A year earlier Krasenkov had played 12 ♖d1 against me in a rapid game in Copenhagen, but after 12...a6 13 ♘c3 ♕d6 14 ♘xe5 ♕xe5 15 f4?! ♕c7 16 ♗f3 ♗e6 17 ♕e2 ♗a7 18 ♔h1 ♖ad8 19 g4!? ♘e4! 20 f5 ♘xc3 21 bxc3 ♗d7 22 ♗xd5 ♗a4 23 ♖d2 ♖xd5! 24 ♖xd5 ♗c6 25 c4 ♕e5! 26 ♗b2 ♕e4+ 27 ♕g2 ♕xe3 it turned out that White's ambitious kingside expansion had just weakened his position – Black is winning.

12...♗g4 13 ♘bd4 ♕d6 14 ♘xe5 ♗xe2 15 ♘xe2 ♕xe5 16 g3 ♘e4

Nimzowitsch explained the value of this outpost square in isolated-pawn positions in *My System*.

17 ♖ad1 a6 18 ♕b3 ♕h5!? 19 ♘c3 ♘f6 20 ♗e1 ♖d8 21 ♕xb7 ♗a7! *(D)*

W



White has temporarily won a pawn but he is vulnerable on the light squares around the king and Black's pieces are active. White's next move intends to cover the light squares but misses a tactical shot.

22 ♔g2?! ♗xe3!

Based on the idea 23 fxe3 ♘g4.

23 ♗d2 ♖ab8 24 ♕xa6 ♗c5

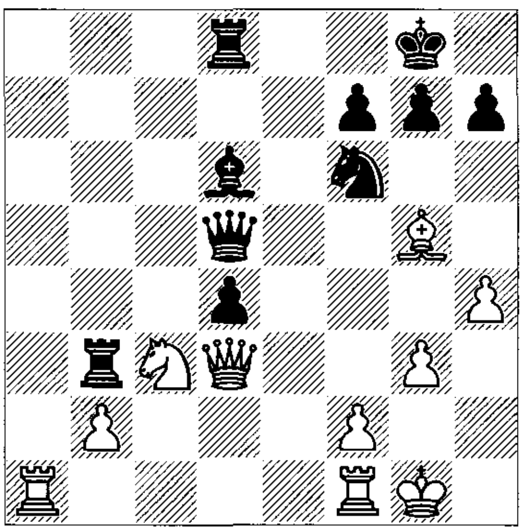
The d5-pawn is now a passed pawn with lust to expand!

25 h4 d4 26 ♘a4 ♕d5+ 27 ♔g1 ♗d6 28 ♕d3?!

This prevents the threatened 28...♕f3, but now Black regains his pawn with advantage. Probably 28 ♗g5! was best, with a complicated position.

28...♕xa2 29 ♖a1 ♕d5 30 ♗g5 ♖b3 31 ♘c3!? *(D)*

B



31...dxc3! 32 ♕xd5 ♘xd5 33 ♗xd8 cxb2

This pawn costs White an exchange at least.

34 ♖ad1 ♖b5 35 ♗g5 ♗b4!

Preventing 36 ♗d2; Black needs c3 for the knight.

36 ♔g2?!

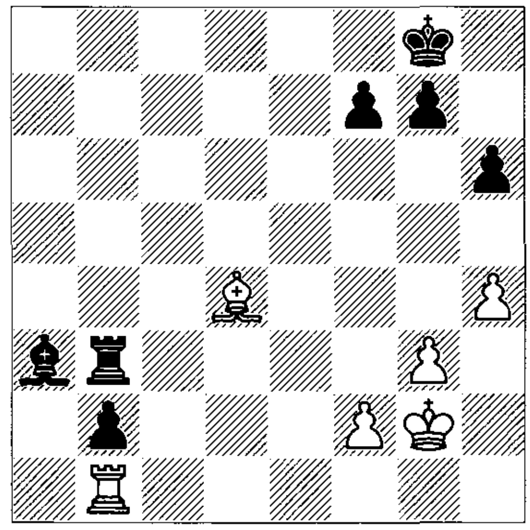
White should try 36 ♖b1 followed by ♗c1, giving up the bishop for the b-pawn. This would ultimately lead to an endgame with rook and three pawns vs bishop, knight and three pawns, with all the pawns on the same wing. While this gives White good drawing chances, Black may still push for a win for a long time. A famous example of the two pieces eventually overcoming the rook in such an endgame is Timman-Karpov, Bugojno 1980. On the other hand, in Capablanca-Em.Lasker, St Petersburg 1914, the reigning World Champion managed to hold on to the draw against his eventual successor in a similar endgame.

36...h6 37 ♗e3 ♘c3 38 ♖de1 ♗a3 39 ♖b1 ♘xb1 40 ♖xb1 ♖b3 41 ♗d4 *(D)*

41...♖d3! 42 ♗xb2

Or 42 ♗e3 ♖c3 followed by 43...♖c1. The ending is a technical win.

B



42...♖b3 43 ♗xa3 ♖xb1 44 h5 ♖b5 45 g4 f5 46 f3 ♔f7 47 ♗d6 ♔e6 48 ♗f8 ♖b7 49 ♔g3 ♔e5 50 ♗c5 fxg4 51 fxg4 ♖b3+ 52 ♔h4 ♔f4 53 ♗d4 ♖b1 54 ♔h3 ♖h1+ 0-1

Black wins after 55 ♔g2 ♖h4.

With White I also started to enter isolated-pawn positions.

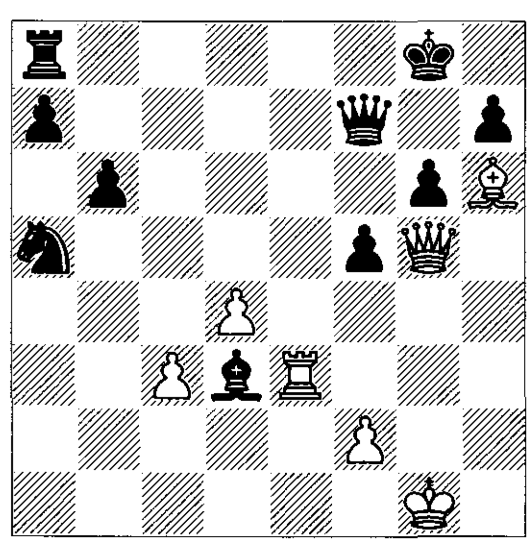
L.B. Hansen – K. Müller

Bundesliga 2000/1

1 c4 c6 2 e4 d5 3 exd5 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 cxd5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 6 ♘f3 e6 7 ♗c4 ♘c6 8 0-0 ♗e7 9 d4 0-0 10 ♖e1 ♘f6

In a game in the Danish League 1995/6, Jelling chose 10...♘xc3 against me, and an interesting game evolved: 11 bxc3 b6 12 ♗d3 ♗b7 13 h4!? (this is Razuvaev's pawn sacrifice, which Black usually declines) 13...♗xh4!? 14 ♘xh4 ♕xh4 15 ♖e3 (in return for the pawn, White has long-term attacking chances and dark-square pressure) 15...g6 16 ♖h3 ♕e7 17 ♗h6 ♖fe8 18 ♕d2 ♘a5 19 ♖e1 ♗d5 20 ♕f4 f6 21 ♕h4 f5 22 ♕f4 ♕f7 23 g4! ♗xa2 24 gxf5 exf5 25 ♖he3 ♖xe3 26 ♖xe3 ♗c4 27 ♕g5 ♗xd3 *(D)*.

W



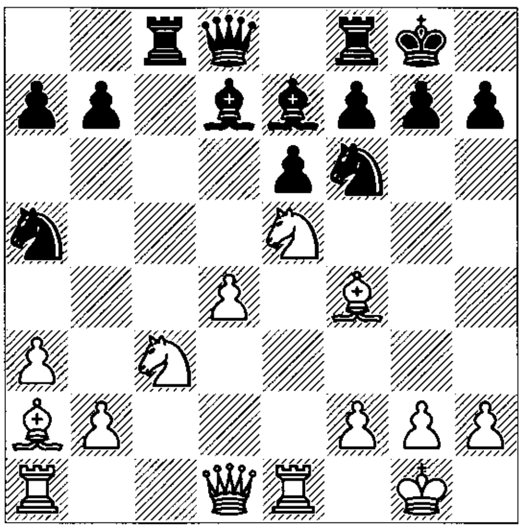
28 ♖e7! (a decisive penetration of the seventh rank) 28...♕b3? (Black had to give up his queen to stay in the game) 29 ♖g7+ ♔h8 30 ♖xa7! 1-0.

11 a3 ♗d7

Somewhat passive but not necessarily bad. Usually the bishop is developed to b7 to increase Black's control of d5.

12 ♗f4 ♖c8 13 ♗a2 ♘a5 14 ♘e5 *(D)*

B



14...♗xa3?

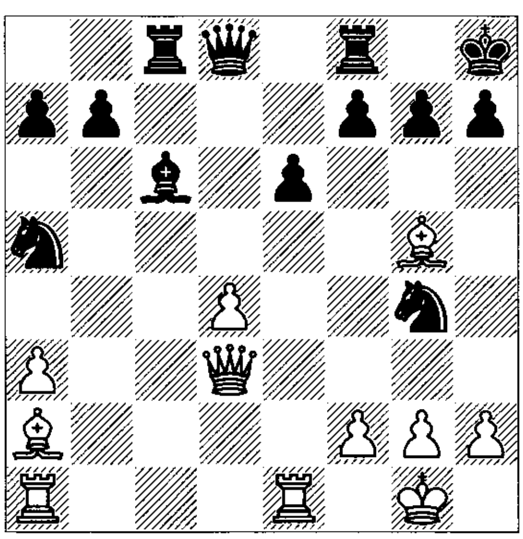
This is too risky. Black wins a pawn but all White's pieces come to life.

15 bxa3 ♖xc3 16 ♗d2 ♖c8 17 ♗g5!

A very annoying pin. Pins are a major tactical motif, and one of Nimzowitsch's 'elements'.

17...♗c6 18 ♘g4! ♔h8 19 ♕d3 ♘xg4!? *(D)*

W



An inspired attempt. After 20 ♗xd8 ♖fxd8 Black has two knights, a pawn and good central control as compensation for the queen. However, White has better than taking the queen:

20 ♗b1!

Always sit on your hands! The text-move forces a lethal dark-squared weakening of the black kingside before taking the queen. Black cannot play 20...♗e4 due to 21 ♕xe4 f5 22 ♗xd8 fxe4 23 ♗xa5, and 20...f5 21 ♗xd8 ♖fxd8 22 ♗a2 drops the e-pawn and opens the way for White's rooks.

20...g6 21 ♗xd8 ♖fxd8 22 ♕c3!

The point. Due to the double threat of 23 ♕xa5 and 23 d5+, White wins further material.

22...♖d5 23 ♗e4 ♖cd8 24 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 25 ♕f3 ♘h6 26 ♖e5 ♘f5 27 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 28 ♕f4 ♘c6 29 ♕c7 ♔g7 30 ♕xb7 ♘cxd4 31 ♕b2 e5 32 ♖c1 ♘h4 33 f3 ♗c6 34 ♖c5 ♔f6 35 ♕b8 ♘hf5 36 ♕xe5+ 1-0

Petrosian: Nimzowitsch's Star Student

Generations of chess-players have learned from Nimzowitsch, but one player stands out who adopted and perfected Nimzowitsch's teachings – the great old master's star student, if you will: Tigran Petrosian. It seems natural to close this chapter on the Hypermodern School by discussing the play of Petrosian, who proved to be a stronghold for the Hypermodern School even as the eras of New Dynamism and subsequently Universality conquered the chess world. Petrosian, with his predominantly Hypermodern style, held the World Championship from 1963 to 1969, just as New Dynamism morphed into Universality.

In my view, Petrosian is somewhat underestimated as a World Champion by the chess public and perhaps even by his peers. Kasparov, in *How Life Imitates Chess*, refers to Petrosian as the "inaction hero", who perfected the strategy of "vigilant inaction". This implies that the Armenian mainly waited for his opponent's mistake. However, Petrosian was certainly very capable of attacking chess, and he won a number of fine attacking games (interested readers may, for instance, want to look up his victories over Smyslov in the USSR Championship, Moscow 1951, and Fischer, Candidates match (game 2), Buenos Aires 1971).

I agree with Bent Larsen, who once remarked that "Petrosian is one of the biggest talents in chess history." In several ways Petrosian resembles Capablanca. Both held the World Championship 'only' for six years, although they may have had potential for more, and both

were blessed with a deep, unsurpassed grasp of the positional subtleties of the game. They also shared a fantastic sense of danger, allowing them to keep their loss ratios lower than perhaps any other top players in chess history. My old chess club's library owned a book containing all Capablanca's losses throughout his career. It was a thin book and it only contained 36 games...

Petrosian himself explained his approach like this: "What I value more than anything in chess is logic. I am firmly convinced that in chess there is nothing accidental. This is my credo. I believe only in logical, 'correct' play." However, perhaps Petrosian's well-developed sense of danger – Fischer remarked that "Petrosian has the ability to see and eliminate danger 20 moves before it arises" – combined with his desire to play 'correct' chess, was also in a certain way his Achilles' Heel. Sensing potential threats that others may have dismissed as 'ghosts' – if they sensed them at all – made him risk-averse and left him at a competitive disadvantage in tournaments in relation to risk-willing competitors like Fischer, Spassky and Larsen. Often Petrosian would remain undefeated but have one or two draws too many...

Nimzowitsch's system left a clear mark on Petrosian's play, and I shall show two Petrosian games that contain the three Hypermodern areas in which Petrosian particularly excelled: *prophylaxis*, *the blockading knight* and *the positional exchange sacrifice*. The basis of all of these can be traced from Nimzowitsch to Petrosian, and further on to our times in the games of Karpov and Kramnik.

Petrosian – Simagin
Match (game 5), Moscow Ch 1956

This game is famous for its concluding combination, a geometrical gem. However, the game itself is well worth studying.

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 d6 4 d4 g6 5 e4 ♗g7 6 ♗e2 0-0 7 0-0 ♗g4?!

It is now well-known that the various ...♗g4 lines of the King's Indian rarely lead to equality for Black. The light-squared bishop is essential in order for a kingside attack to be really dangerous.

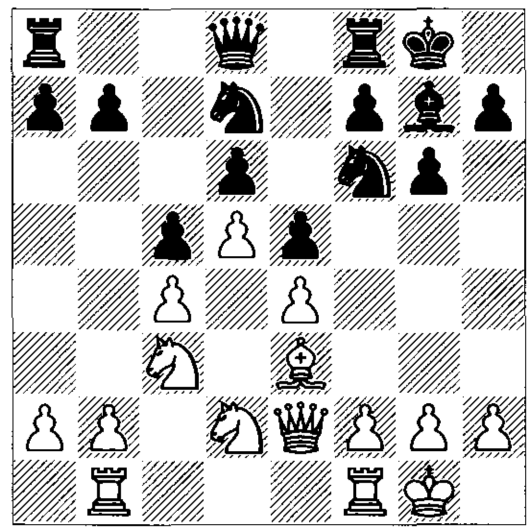
8 ♗e3 ♘bd7 9 ♘d2! ♗xe2 10 ♕xe2 e5

The attempt to build a stronghold in the centre on the light squares with 10...e6 is strongly met by 11 f4 d5 12 e5 with a clear space advantage for White (Petrosian).

11 d5 c5 12 ♖ab1!? *(D)*

The alternative is 12 a3 followed by 13 b4, but Petrosian is not afraid of taking back with the rook on b4 – and the game shows why.

B

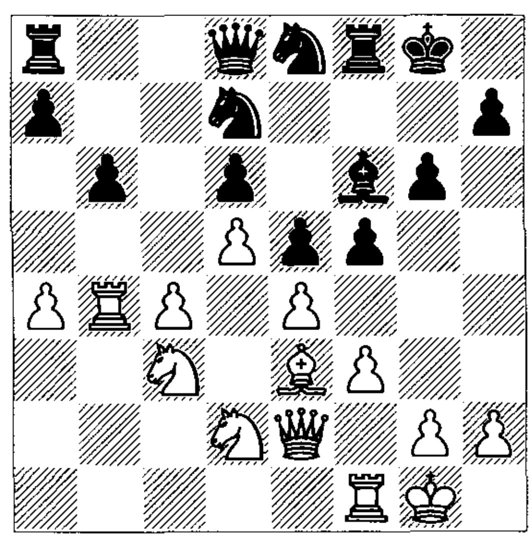


12...♘e8 13 f3 f5 14 b4 cxb4 15 ♖xb4 b6 16 a4!

By now a standard approach in the King's Indian. White intends to 'soften' b6.

16...♗f6! *(D)*

W



A good positional move, intending to get rid of the 'bad bishop' by 17...♗g5.

17 ♔h1!

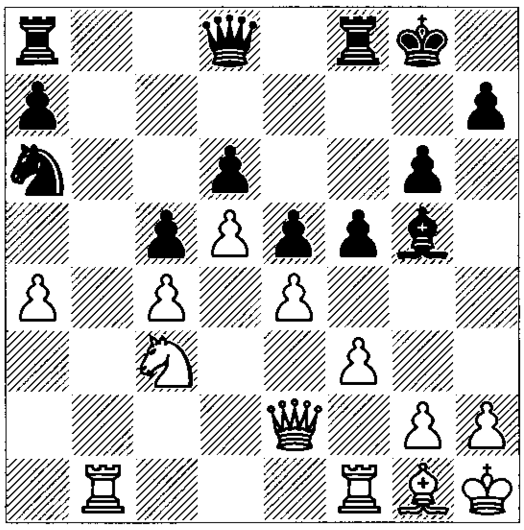
Prophylaxis! The king itself was safe enough on g1, but this square is needed for the bishop in order to prevent Black from trading his bad bishop.

17...♗g5 18 ♗g1! ♘c7?

In his notes in his book of his best games, Petrosian is critical of this move – and the plan behind it. Instead he recommends 18...♘ef6, with just an edge for White.

19 ♖bb1 ♘a6 20 ♘b3 ♘dc5 21 ♘xc5 bxc5 *(D)*

W



This was Simagin's idea. Now he intends to close the b-file by 22...♘b4. However, the knight has drifted too far away from the centre and the kingside, and Petrosian sees his chance to secure a wonderful *blockading square* for his knight.

22 exf5! gxf5 23 g4!

The point! White's knight gets access to e4, and Petrosian has rightly judged that the slight weakening of the kingside is of no importance. In fact, soon *White* will be the one attacking on the kingside!

23...fxg4 24 ♘e4! ♗f4

24...gxf3 25 ♖xf3 ♖xf3 26 ♕xf3 ♗f4 27 ♖b7 gives White a crushing attack. Black must keep the position closed.

25 ♖b7! ♘c7

Hoping to redirect the knight to the defence via e8 and f6 to oppose White's majestic knight on e4. However, Petrosian is in time to prevent this defensive manoeuvre. Once more prophylaxis! By the way, 25...gxf3 was still ill-advised in view of 26 ♕xf3 followed by 27 ♕h5.

26 fxg4 ♘e8 27 g5!

Just in time to prevent 27...♘f6, and at the same time opening diagonals for White's queen.

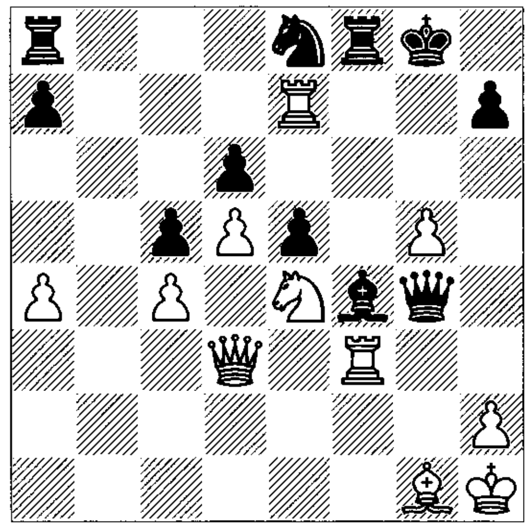
27...♕c8 28 ♖e7! ♕h3 29 ♖f3 ♕g4 30 ♕d3 *(D)*

30...♗xh2!?

A spirited attempt by Simagin to change the course of the game, but it is insufficient. However, Black needed to do something to meet White's threats of 31 ♘xd6! ♘xd6 32 ♕xh7# or simply 31 ♖h3, hitting h7.

31 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 32 ♖xe8+! ♖xe8 33 ♗xh2 ♖e7

B



33...♕d7 and 33...♔e7 both lose to 34 ♘f6, so Black cannot defend d6.

34 ♘xd6 ♕xg5

Or 34...e4 35 ♕f1+ ♔g8 (35...♕f3+ 36 ♔g1!) 36 ♘f5 and White wins.

35 ♕f1+ ♔g8 36 ♘e4

According to Petrosian 36 ♕g1 was simpler, forcing the exchange of queens.

36...♕h4 37 ♕e2 ♖g7 38 d6 ♕h6 39 ♕d1?!

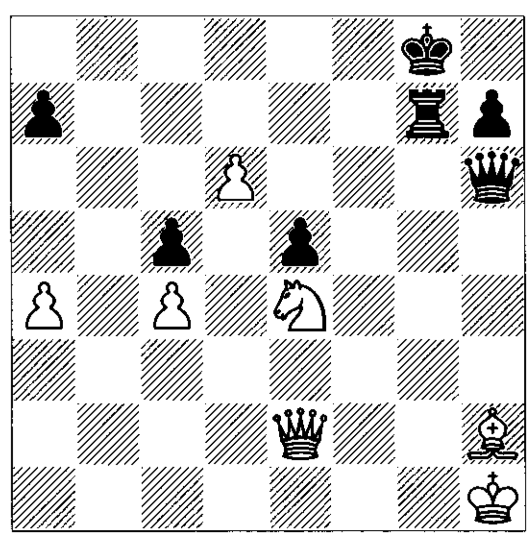
An inaccuracy just before the time-control. 39 ♕f1 – as on move 41 – was more precise.

39...♕h4?!

Black too errs. 39...♕h3! offers better resistance, taking control of the light squares.

40 ♕e2 ♕h6 *(D)*

W



41 ♕f1!

The right square for the queen, defending the light squares and threatening 42 ♘f6+ and 43 d7.

41...♖f7 42 ♕g2+ ♔f8

After 42...♖g7, White wins by 43 d7! (Petrosian).

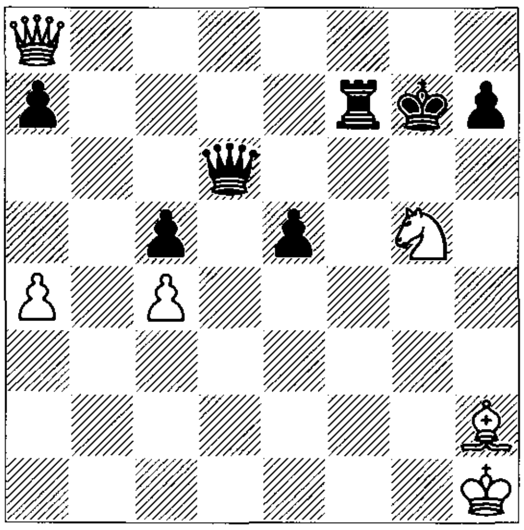
43 ♘g5 ♕xd6?!

A blunder in a lost position. Better was 43...♖d7, although White should eventually prevail after 44 ♕f3+ ♔g7 (44...♔g8 45 ♕d5+) 45

♘e4 ♕c1+ 46 ♔g2. Now follows the beautiful combination that has made this game famous.

44 ♕a8+ ♔g7 *(D)*

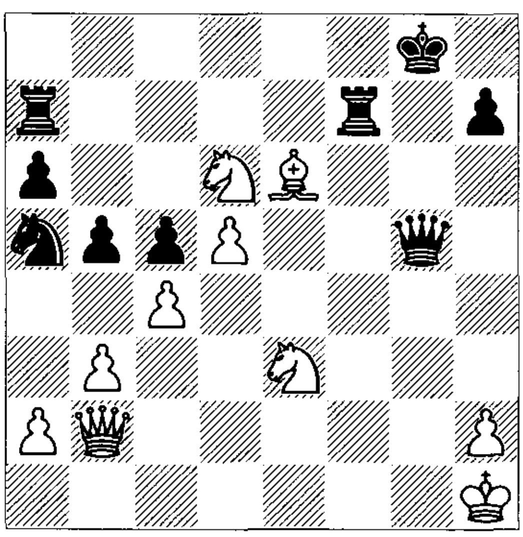
W



45 ♗xe5+! ♕xe5 46 ♕h8+! ♔xh8 47 ♘xf7+ 1-0

I cannot leave out the conclusion of the 10th game from the first Petrosian-Spassky World Championship match – the one in 1966 that Petrosian won to retain his title – where the Armenian got the chance to 'reprise' his own combination.

W



Petrosian – Spassky

World Ch match (game 10), Moscow 1966

29 ♗xf7+ ♖xf7 30 ♕h8+! 1-0

Da capo!

Dückstein – Petrosian

Varna Olympiad 1962

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♘xe4 ♗f5 5 ♘g3 ♗g6 6 ♘f3 ♘d7 7 ♗d3

A solid move but not as ambitious as 7 h4.

7...e6!?

Petrosian takes the aggressive route and goes for queenside castling! I have included this game to show how Petrosian was not afraid to play sharply when he felt it was appropriate. A solid alternative is 7...♗xd3 8 ♕xd3 e6 9 0-0 ♘gf6 10 ♖e1 ♗e7 11 c3 0-0 12 ♗f4 ♖e8 13 ♖ad1 ♕a5 14 a3 ♘h5! with equality, Rabiega-L.B.Hansen, 2nd Bundesliga 2005/6.

8 0-0 ♕c7 9 c4 0-0-0!?

Who said Petrosian was a boring player? Here he voluntarily strives for a double-edged position with opposite-side castling. Superficially White seems to have easier access to initiating an attack by throwing his queenside pawns forward, but Petrosian judges that his central counterplay will keep him safe. An interesting game is on the cards!

10 ♗xg6 hxg6 11 ♕a4 ♔b8 12 b4! ♘h6!

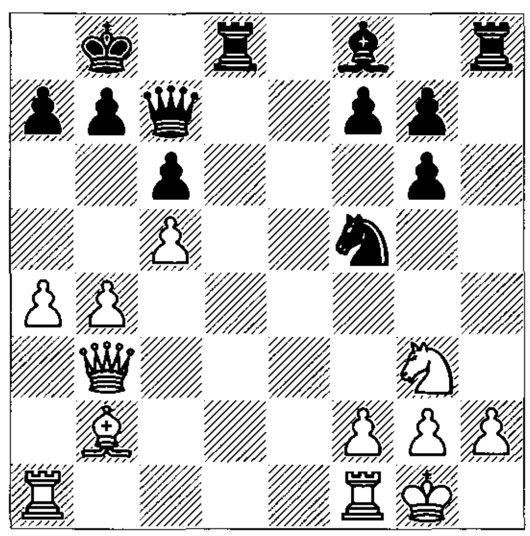
Looking for a nice square on f5, from where the knight targets d4 and g3.

13 ♕b3 ♘f5 14 a4 e5!

A flank attack must be met by a counterstroke in the centre!

15 dxe5 ♘xe5 16 ♘xe5 ♕xe5 17 ♗b2 ♕c7 18 c5 *(D)*

B



18...a5!?

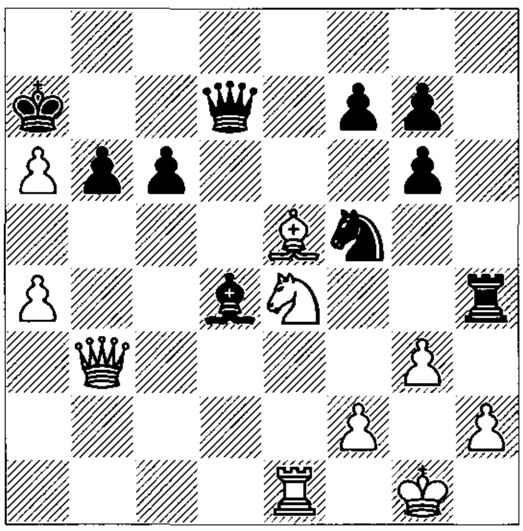
Petrosianesque! A basic rule of thumb has it that you should not voluntarily expose yourself on the wing where you are weaker. A decent alternative was 18...♖h4, but Petrosian's subtle understanding of the position tells him that Black can afford to weaken his king's position. In return he destroys White's pawn-structure and activates the hitherto passive bishop on f8. Still, it takes courage to play in this way, and the position remains sharp and complicated.

19 ♖ad1 ♖xd1 20 ♖xd1 ♖h4! 21 bxa5 ♗xc5 22 a6 b6 23 ♖e1?!

White misses a good chance to grab the initiative. With 23 ♘xf5! he could have put doubt on Petrosian's strategy. Then 23...♕xh2+? loses to 24 ♔f1 gxf5 25 ♖d8+ and 26 ♕xf7+, while after 23...gxf5 24 g3 ♖e4 (24...♖g4 is possible but looks rather passive) White may simply play 25 ♗xg7, when Black still needs to prove that the plan begun on move 18 was correct.

23...♔a7 24 ♗e5 ♕d7 25 ♘e4 ♗d4 26 g3 *(D)*

B



26...♗xe5!?

Petrosian shows no fear in this game – here is another of his trademark positional exchange sacrifices. The sacrifice was not forced; Black seems fine after 26...♖h8. However, Petrosian is confident that his strong centralized knight and White's scattered pawns will provide ample compensation.

27 gxh4 ♘d4 28 ♕d1 ♕d5 29 ♖e3 ♘f5 30 ♖e1 ♘d4 31 ♕d3?

Would Petrosian have taken a draw through repetition after 31 ♖e3? I doubt it; he liked repeating moves before playing on in such positions, as he believed this had a psychological effect on the opponent. Still, White should probably have played 31 ♖e3, because in that case his knight can retreat to c3 after 31...f5 since f3 is defended.

31...f5!

Now, on the other hand, the knight is pushed to a passive square from which it has difficulty returning into play.

32 ♘g5 c5! 33 ♖e3 c4 34 ♕d1?!

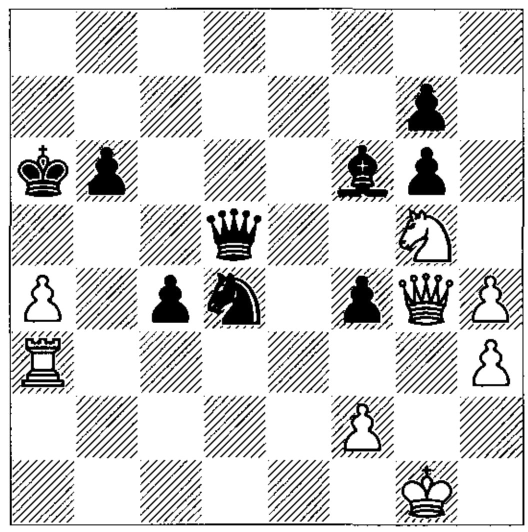
34 ♖xe5!? ♕xe5 35 ♕xc4 is probably a better try, although Black maintains a pull in the endgame. His king is safer and White's queenside pawns are vulnerable.

34...♔xa6

Now even my computer program – Shredder 10 – starts preferring Black! White's problem is that his pieces are uncoordinated and his pawns scattered and weak.

35 ♖a3 ♗f6 36 h3 f4 37 ♕g4?! *(D)*

B



37...♔a5!

Petrosian was fond of the active king. He used this concept in several games, the most famous probably being Fischer-Petrosian, Candidates tournament, Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade 1959. White's pieces are overloaded, and the inclusion of the king into the offensive decides the game. Surprisingly, the rook on a3 is about to be trapped and annihilated!

38 ♘f3?!

This loses immediately, but 38 ♕d1 does not help either because of 38...♔b4! 39 ♖a1 ♘e2+! 40 ♔f1 (40 ♕xe2 ♗xa1) 40...♘g3+! 41 fxg3 ♕h1+ 42 ♔f2 ♕h2+ 43 ♔f1 ♗xa1, and Black wins.

38...♔b4! 39 ♘xd4 ♔xa3 40 ♘c2+ ♔xa4 0-1

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.
George Bernard Shaw

4 New Dynamism

To get squares you gotta give squares!
BOBBY FISCHER

After World War II, the world faced a new world order, not just in the political sense but also on the chessboard. A new paradigm of strategic understanding saw the light of day, driven by a number of Soviet players that emerged on the scene in the 1950s and 1960s – players like David Bronstein, Efim Geller, Leonid Stein and Mikhail Tal, to name just a few. These players were proponents of a different style from 'the old guard'. They added one important new component to the understanding of chess strategy – *dynamism.*

The teachings of Steinitz and Tarrasch in the Scientific School, and to a lesser extent also Nimzowitsch and Réti in the Hypermodern School, mainly dealt with the *static* elements of chess strategy. The new dynamic paradigm did not alter the assessment of these static elements as being vitally important, but refined the understanding of the interplay between the elements by continuously rearranging the elements in each specific context. In other words, the value of each strategic element from the Scientific and Hypermodern Schools is not static; it depends on the concrete context. In some positions weak pawns are less important than in others, and in some positions the value of the centre may be more or less – it all depends on the specific position. As the quote by Fischer at the top of this chapter indicates, dynamism is about trade-offs; you are willing to give up something to obtain something (hopefully more valuable).

It is noteworthy that with the exception of the brief reign of Tal in 1960-1, none of the driving forces of this new paradigm made it all the way to the World Championship. The other World Champions of that period – Botvinnik (1948-57, 1958-60 and 1961-3), Smyslov (1957-8) and Petrosian (1963-9) were more akin to the old positional style than the new one, although of course they learned to master this new element of chess too. We have seen this pattern before – that the driving forces behind a new paradigm don't necessarily end up as World Champions. Steinitz managed to do it, and later Kasparov, but none of the original Hypermoderns made it to the highest title. Sometimes it takes time for the chess world to absorb a new paradigm, and in the case of New Dynamism it took until Spassky, Fischer and Karpov for the paradigm to be internalized. These three champions – along with some other key proponents of the time – will be discussed in the next chapter, under the heading 'The Age of Universality'. That's because I consider these three World Champions all-round players who mastered all the existing paradigms at the time – romantic, scientific, hypermodern and new dynamism – although of course each with his own distinct style. However, Spassky, Fischer and Karpov in my understanding did not invent a new paradigm – they perfected the existing ones and in that way paved the way for new advances. It was for Kasparov with his rise to the top in the 1980s to originate the next really new paradigm, the one that I refer to as 'Creative Concreteness'.

But let us not get ahead of ourselves here; in this chapter the development of New Dynamism is in the forefront. Let us start with a game between the dominant figure of the time, World Champion Botvinnik, and one of the main proponents of New Dynamism, Efim Geller. This game contrasts their differences in style and perception of chess.

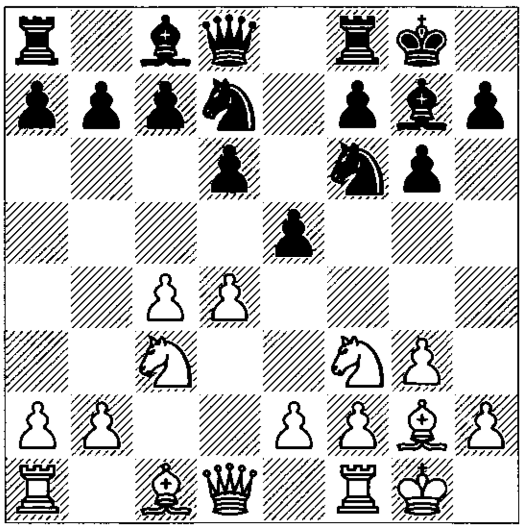
Botvinnik – Geller
Budapest 1952

Geller was a very difficult opponent for Botvinnik. The World Champion managed to beat Geller only once in eight games – in the USSR Championship 1952 – while he lost four, all with White! As Erik André Andersen points

out in his excellent book *The Soviet School of Chess* (in Danish), the usual pattern of their games would be that either Geller would win, or Botvinnik would fail to win a winning position!

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 ♗g7 4 ♗g2 0-0 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♘f3 ♘bd7 7 0-0 e5 *(D)*

W

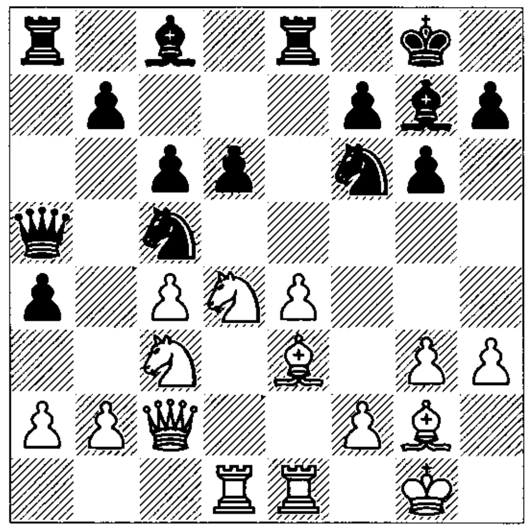


Together with Bronstein and Boleslavsky, Geller was one of the early experts on the King's Indian, and this trio injected a lot of life into this opening. It fitted the new dynamic style excellently, and such a classical positional player as Botvinnik often had a hard time controlling the dynamic elements of the position in his encounters with these players. In *My Great Predecessors*, Kasparov has a very interesting explanation of the King's Indian, which highlights the problems that a classical player had in such positions: "The position resembles a coiled spring: the problem is that any activity by White will merely create additional weaknesses for him. This highly important discovery signified a new level of understanding in chess! Long before, Steinitz had said that 'an attack has chances of success only when the opponent's position is weakened', and he advised caution when advancing pawns, since otherwise they may prove weak. However, that was a general directive – now its live embodiment appeared: Black has set up a concrete opening scheme, disclosing the deep meaning of Steinitzian philosophy. It is on such a continuity of ideas that the entire history of chess development is based."

8 e4 exd4 9 ♘xd4 ♘c5 10 h3 ♖e8 11 ♖e1 a5 12 ♕c2 a4 13 ♗e3 c6 14 ♖ad1 ♕a5 *(D)*

Another possibility is 14...♘fd7. The next year, this position was reached in a number of games in the famous Candidates tournament in Zurich. 15 f4 was tested in the game Ståhlberg-Boleslavsky, 15 ♖e2 in Euwe-Gligorić, and 15 ♘de2?! in Reshevsky-Bronstein, in which Black obtained a good position after 15...♕a5! 16 ♗f1 ♘e5 17 ♘d4 (admitting that the 15th move was inaccurate) 17...a3! 18 f4 ♘ed7 19 b3 ♘a6! 20 ♗f2 ♘dc5 21 ♖e3 ♘b4 22 ♕e2 ♗d7. Nowadays 15 b4!? is considered best according to Kasparov.

W



15 a3?!

A clear indication that Botvinnik did not feel confident in such dynamic positions. Better was 15 ♗f4 or 15 f4. Here the World Champion misjudged the positional elements. With 15 a3 he wants to contain Black's dynamic play on the dark squares as in the Reshevsky-Bronstein game above by prohibiting ...a3. Having neutralized Black's counterplay, he then hopes to be able to put pressure on the backward pawn on d6, which according to Steinitz's theory is weak. However, this is an overly simplified view of the position. Black's dynamic possibilities more than compensate for the apparent static weakness of d6. This is the crux of the matter in New Dynamism – that dynamic factors often outweigh the positional ones from the Scientific and Hypermodern Schools. Kasparov explains it well in his notes to this game in *My Great Predecessors, Volume 2*: "This position proved excessively complicated even for Botvinnik, who was famed for his strategic thinking. He had not yet encountered such problems. Whereas in his game with Capablanca *[the famous game Botvinnik-Capablanca, AVRO tournament, Rotterdam 1938, which Botvinnik won in excellent style – LBH]* the plan was clear to him, here the evaluation was influenced by

numerous factors of different degrees of importance, non-obvious connections of positional elements, which it was not easy to accurately consider and weigh up. The main conclusion for future generations was that White has insufficient compensation for the voluntary weakening of the queenside and the appearance of the 'eternal' knight on c5 – the static weakness at d6 proves less significant than Black's dynamic trumps."

15...♘fd7 16 ♗f1 ♖e7 17 f4?!

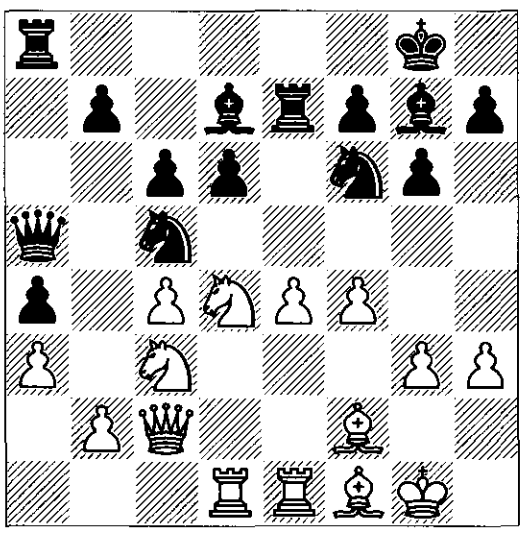
This apparently aggressive move merely weakens e4...

17...♘f6!

...which Black gratefully targets.

18 ♗f2 ♗d7 *(D)*

W

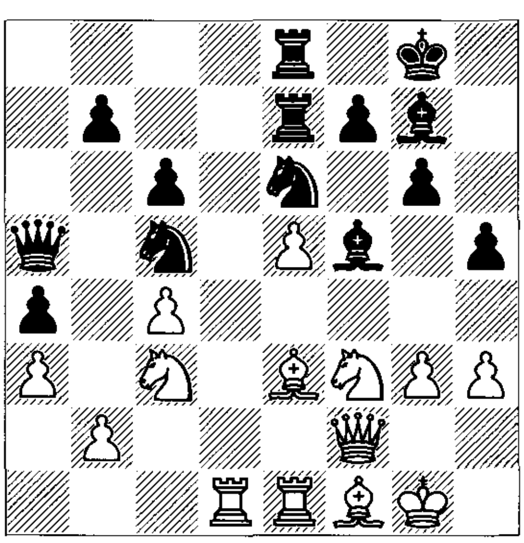


19 e5!?

An admission that the strategic idea of pressuring and annihilating the d6-pawn has come to naught. However, White could hardly wait, as Black was threatening simply to increase the pressure on e4 by ...♖ae8.

19...dxe5 20 fxe5 ♘e8 21 ♘f3 ♗f5 22 ♕e2 h5 23 ♗d4 ♘c7 24 ♕f2 ♘7e6 25 ♗e3 ♖ae8 *(D)*

W

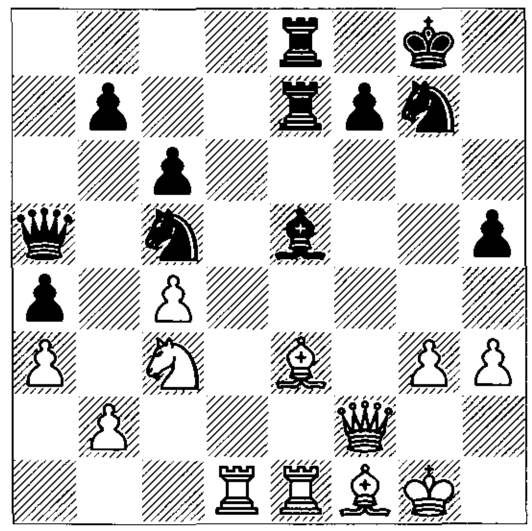


26 ♘h4?

Once again Botvinnik misjudges the dynamic features of the position. Now Black's pieces come to life. Correct, as indicated by Kasparov, was 26 ♖d6! ♖d7 27 ♖ed1 ♖ed8, and although Black's position is to be preferred, there is still all to play for. Now it quickly goes downhill for White.

26...♗xe5! 27 ♘xf5 gxf5 28 ♕xf5 ♘g7! 29 ♕f2 *(D)*

B



29...♗xc3!

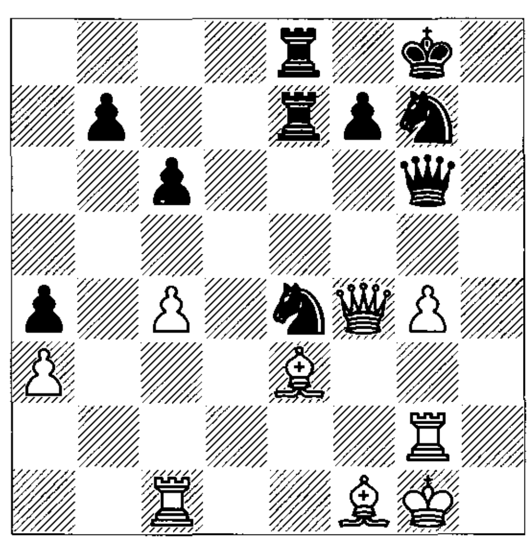
Again the dynamic, non-trivial approach! Black is not afraid of giving up the dark-squared bishop, as his king is well defended by the knight on g7.

30 bxc3 ♘e4 31 ♕f4 ♘xc3 32 ♖c1 ♘a2 33 ♖cd1 ♘c3 34 ♖c1 ♘e4 35 ♖e2 ♕f5 36 g4 hxg4 37 hxg4 ♕g6!

With White having weakened his king by playing g4, Black prefers to keep the queens on.

38 ♖g2 *(D)*

B



38...♘g5!

Forcing a favourable exchange.

39 ♕xg5

After 39 ♖g3 Kasparov gives the beautiful win 39...♘f3+! 40 ♖xf3 ♖e4! 41 ♕h6 ♖xe3 42

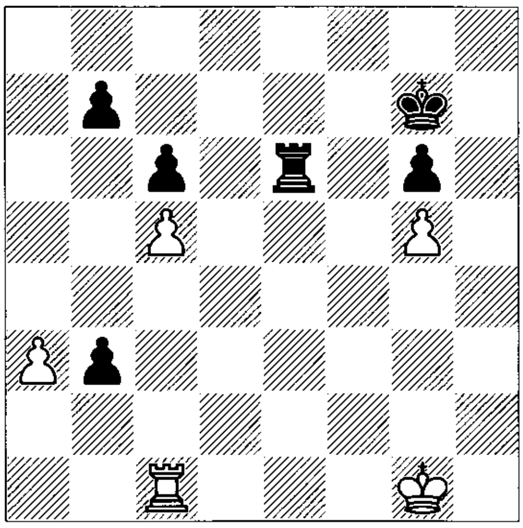
♕xe3 ♖xe3 43 ♖xe3 ♕xg4+ 44 ♔h1 ♘f5 45 ♗h3 ♕f4 46 ♖e8+ ♔g7 47 ♖g1+ ♔f6.

39...♖xe3 40 ♕xg6 fxg6 41 c5 ♘e6 42 ♖b2 ♖e7 43 ♗c4 ♔g7 44 ♗xe6 ♖7xe6 45 g5

45 ♖xb7+ ♔f6 is equally hopeless for White.

45...♖b3! 46 ♖xb3 axb3 *(D)*

W



47 ♖d1?!

This loses immediately, but the ending after 47 ♖b1 ♖e3 48 ♔f2 ♖c3 49 ♔e2 ♔f7 50 ♔d2 ♖xc5 51 ♖xb3 b5 52 ♖f3+ ♖f5 53 ♖c3 c5 54 ♖b3 c4 55 ♖g3 ♔e6 is also lost (Kasparov).

47...♖e2 0-1

David Bronstein was another dominant figure in New Dynamism. Botvinnik called Bronstein "World Champion of the transition between opening and middlegame". Like Geller, he was very fond of the King's Indian and played many beautiful games with this opening. Two of the most famous ones – against Pachman and Zita – were played in the match Moscow-Prague 1946. In *My Great Predecessors*, Kasparov writes that "these games were the 'big explosion' with which modern chess began" – the birth of New Dynamism! The Pachman game is the better-known, so let us here take a look at the other one.

Zita – Bronstein

Moscow – Prague 1946

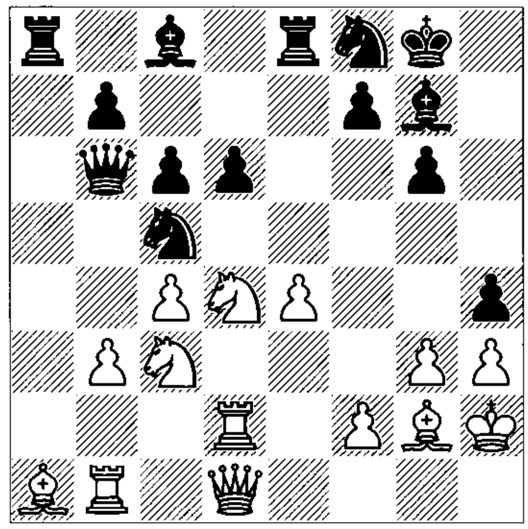
1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♘f6 3 ♘f3 d6 4 d4 ♘bd7 5 g3 g6 6 ♗g2 ♗g7 7 0-0 0-0 8 b3?!

Nowadays 8 e4 is considered best. 8 b3 hands Black a target that he can attack with ...a5-a4.

8...♖e8 9 ♗b2 c6 10 e4 exd4 11 ♘xd4 ♕b6 12 ♕d2 ♘c5 13 ♖fe1 a5 14 ♖ab1 a4! 15 ♗a1?!

Better was 15 ♘xa4 ♘xa4 16 bxa4 ♕a5, although Black is fine here. The text-move allows Bronstein to set up the same combination as a few days earlier against Pachman:

B



Pachman – Bronstein

Moscow – Prague 1946

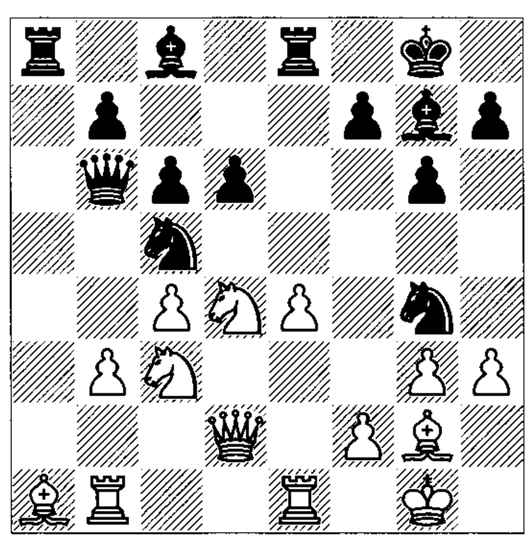
20...♖xa1! 21 ♖xa1 ♗xd4 22 ♖xd4 ♘xb3 23 ♖xd6 ♕xf2! 24 ♖a2 (24 ♕xb3 hxg3+ 25 ♔h1 ♗xh3! 26 ♖g1 ♗xg2+ 27 ♖xg2 ♕f1+ 28 ♖g1 ♕h3#!) 24...♕xg3+ 25 ♔h1 ♕xc3 26 ♖a3 ♗xh3! 27 ♖xb3 ♗xg2+ 28 ♔xg2 ♕xc4 29 ♖d4 ♕e6 30 ♖xb7 ♖a8 31 ♕e2 h3+! 0-1.

Let's return to the Zita game:

15...axb3 16 axb3 ♘g4 17 h3? *(D)*

Missing Bronstein's beautiful idea. As pointed out by Kasparov, White should play 17 ♖ed1! (overprotecting d4!) 17...♘e5 18 h3, when he is still in the game.

B



Notice that the black rook on a8 and the bishop on c8 have not moved. Bronstein made an interesting comment about this: "The most interesting thing – and this is one of the most original and valuable ideas in the King's Indian

Defence – is that the rook on a8 and the bishop at c8 are splendidly developed, without making a single move and standing on their original squares." Just like the Hypermodern School changed our perception about the value of the centre – that the centre can be dominated from afar – the New Dynamism School refined our perception about the meaning of the term 'development'. A piece need not move to be considered 'developed', and conversely a piece that has moved may not have contributed much to development.

17...♖xa1! 18 ♖xa1 ♘xf2!

The point! After 19 ♔xf2 ♘xb3 or 19 ♕xf2 ♘d3 White experiences a meltdown on the d4-square.

19 ♖e3 ♘xh3+ 20 ♔h2 ♘f2!

Back again! The knight is still immune due to 21...♗xd4. White is lost as his pieces lack any coordination.

21 ♖f3 ♘cxe4 22 ♕f4 ♘g4+ 23 ♔h1 f5 24 ♘xe4 ♖xe4 25 ♕xd6 ♖xd4 26 ♕b8 ♖d8 27 ♖a8 ♗e5 28 ♕a7 ♕b4 29 ♕a2 ♕f8! 30 ♗h3 ♕h6 0-1

Another player that rose to prominence in the 1960s with a style in accordance with the New Dynamism principles was Leonid Stein. Sadly Stein died in 1973 at the age of 38. In 1961 Stein made his debut in the USSR Championship, and he promptly made a name for himself with the following game against the man who was to become World Champion two years later.

Stein – Petrosian

USSR Ch, Moscow 1961

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♘e7 7 ♕g4 ♘f5?!

Today this move is less common than 7...0-0 or 7...♕c7. However, it is still occasionally seen, and Petrosian had played it before.

8 ♗d3 h5 9 ♕f4

Four years earlier, in the USSR Championship in Moscow 1957, Tal chose 9 ♕h3 against Petrosian and eventually won after 9...cxd4 10 ♘f3 ♘c6 (10...♕c7 is probably better, as played by Korchnoi against Tal in 1958) 11 g4! ♘fe7 12 gxh5 ♕c7 13 ♗f4 ♘g6 14 ♕g4 ♘xf4 15 ♕xf4 dxc3 16 ♕g5! ♕e7 17 ♕xg7 ♕f8 18 ♕g5. Petrosian must have had an improvement ready, which Stein elects to sidestep.

9...♘c6

Here Black has two alternatives that may be better. In 1983, shortly before his death, Petrosian played 9...♕h4 against Tal in the USSR Championship in Moscow 1983, and after 10 ♘e2 ♕xf4 11 ♘xf4 ♘e7 12 ♗e2 h4 13 ♘h5 ♔f8 14 ♗g5 cxd4 15 cxd4 b6! 16 0-0-0 ♗a6 17 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 18 g4 ♘g6 he eventually managed to draw. 9...♕c7!? was tried in the game Carlsen-Pelletier, Biel 2005, in which a wild position arose after 10 ♘e2 ♘e7 11 dxc5!? ♘d7 12 0-0 ♕xe5 13 ♕a4 ♕c7 14 ♗e3 e5, although that game too ended in a draw.

10 ♘e2 ♘ce7 11 ♘g3 ♘g6 12 ♕d2 ♗d7 13 ♖b1!

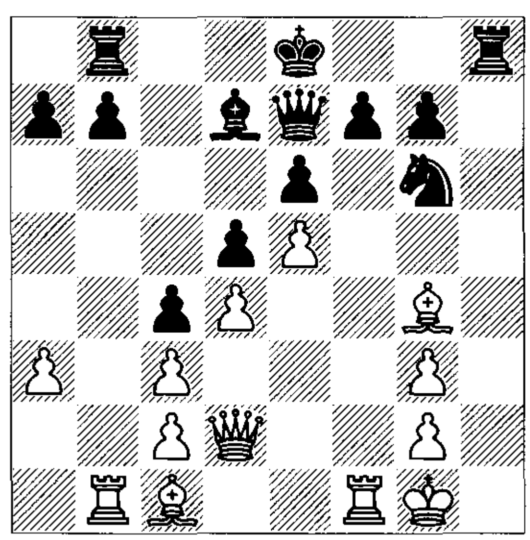
A little move with great effect! Black's reply is forced as 13...♕c7 is inconveniently met by 14 ♕g5!, but after moving the rook Black has lost the possibility of castling queenside.

13...♖b8 14 0-0 c4 15 ♗e2 ♘xg3 16 fxg3!

Of course! The open f-file promises White good attacking chances. Black is already in trouble, the problem being his exposed king.

16...h4 17 ♗g4 hxg3 18 hxg3 ♕e7 *(D)*

W



19 a4!

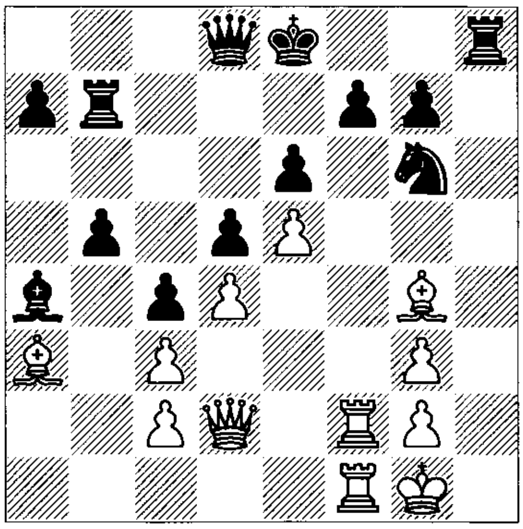
A pawn for a diagonal! New Dynamism is about optimizing the scope of the pieces, and the dark-squared bishop belongs on the a3-f8 diagonal. A pawn is a small price to pay for that.

19...♗xa4 20 ♖a1 b5 21 ♗a3 ♕d7 22 ♖f2!

Again White's main objective is to activate his pieces. Black has a hard time countering White's plan of doubling rooks on the f-file because of the dark-squared bishop's control of f8.

22...♖b7 23 ♖af1 ♕d8 *(D)*

W



24 ♕d1!

Quiet moves are often a key tactical device. Here White sets up the powerful threat of 25 ♖xf7! ♖xf7 26 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 27 ♕f3+ ♔e8 (27...♔g8? 28 ♗xe6+ ♔h7 29 ♕h5#) 28 ♗xe6 ♕c7 29 ♗d6 ♕b7 30 ♗xd5, and White crashes through, as indicated by E.A.Andersen. Because of the maximum dynamism of the white pieces, Black is defenceless.

24...♖h6 25 ♗c1 ♖h7 26 ♗xe6! 1-0

White wins after 26...fxe6 27 ♕g4. A fine game by Stein. However, despite losing this game, Petrosian won the USSR Championship that year, ahead of Korchnoi, Geller, Stein, Smyslov and Spassky.

Isaak Boleslavsky was close to the top around 1950. That year he tied for first in the Candidates tournament with Bronstein and lost the play-off narrowly 7½-6½. I include the following game because I remember being impressed by it when I first saw it in Kotov's book *Think Like a Grandmaster.* He used it to illustrate the use of *candidate moves* (more on this in Chapter 6) and the *tree of variations*.

Boleslavsky – Flohr
USSR Ch, Moscow 1950

1 e4 c6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗g4 4 h3 ♗xf3

This exchange normally leads to quieter play than 4...♗h5, which is fine too.

5 ♕xf3 e6 6 d4 ♘f6 7 ♗d3!?

Like in Stein-Petrosian, White is ready to sacrifice a pawn for dynamic piece-play – a typical feature of New Dynamism. However, here Black need not take it.

7...dxe4 8 ♘xe4 ♕xd4

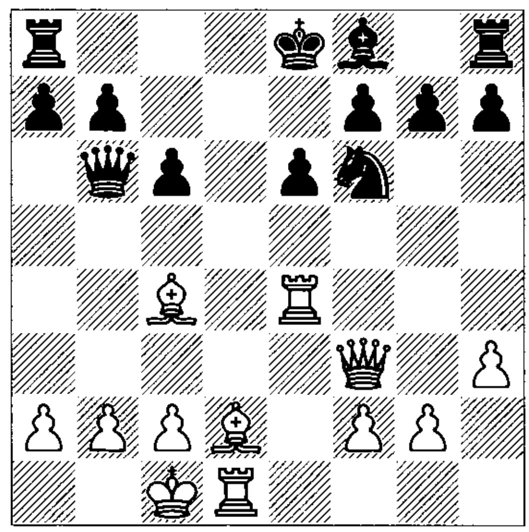
Surprising! From Flohr one would rather have expected the calm 8...♘bd7. Flohr was a solid player who in the 1930s was among the best in the world. In a match of 12 games in 1933 Botvinnik only narrowly escaped with a 6-6 draw. However, after the war Flohr had lost much of his playing strength and, perhaps even more significantly, his ambition.

9 ♗e3 ♕d8

9...♕xb2 10 0-0 is too dangerous for Black, as he will never be able to get his pieces out in time.

10 0-0-0 ♘bd7 11 ♗c4! ♕a5 12 ♗d2 ♕b6 13 ♖he1 ♘xe4 14 ♖xe4 ♘f6 *(D)*

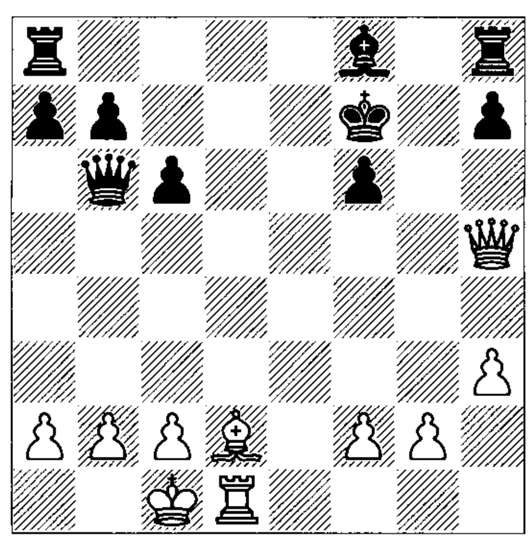
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15 ♗xe6! fxe6 16 ♖xe6+ ♗e7?!

This loses prosaically. The critical move was 16...♔f7, after which White continues his attack with 17 ♖xf6+! gxf6 18 ♕h5+ *(D)*.

B



In *Think Like a Grandmaster,* Kotov now explains how, before sacrificing on e6, White should systematically build a *tree of variations* to guide his calculations. That is, in this position he should mentally imagine a tree with four branches signifying Black's options here –

18...♔e7, 18...♔e6, 18...♔g7 and 18...♔g8, which must all be systematically investigated. I shall leave it to the reader to build the tree – it is a good analytical exercise. The main line goes 18...♔g8 19 ♕g4+ ♔f7 (19...♗g7 loses to 20 ♕c4+ ♔f8 21 ♗b4+) 20 ♕c4+ ♔g6 (20...♔g7 21 ♗e3! ♕c7 22 ♕g4+ and 23 ♖d7+) 21 ♕e4+! ♔f7 (21...♔g7 22 ♗e3 as before) 22 ♗a5! ♕c5 (22...♕xa5? 23 ♖d7+ and 22...♗h6+ 23 ♔b1 ♖ad8 24 ♕c4+! ♔g7 25 ♕g4+! ♔f7 26 ♗xb6 both lose for Black) 23 ♖d7+ ♗e7 (perhaps 23...♕e7 is the best chance but with the black king exposed, White should win) 24 ♗b4 ♕g5+ 25 f4 and White wins.

17 ♖de1 ♘d5

17...0-0 18 ♖xe7! ♘d5 19 ♖xg7+! ♔xg7 20 ♗c3+! ♘xc3 21 ♖e7+ ♔h6 22 ♕xc3 leaves Black defenceless, as pointed out by E.A.Andersen.

18 ♗g5 0-0-0 19 ♗xe7 ♘xe7 20 ♖xe7

Now the win is elementary.

20...♖hf8 21 ♕g4+ ♔b8 22 ♕xg7 ♕xf2 23 b3

Luft! Of course, White does not fall for the trap 23 ♖xb7+? ♔a8 24 ♖be7 ♕d2+ 25 ♔b1 ♕d1+.

23...♖g8 24 ♕xh7 ♖xg2 25 ♖xb7+ ♔a8 26 ♖be7 ♕c5 27 h4 a5 28 ♖e8 ♕d4 29 ♔b1 ♖d2 30 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 31 ♕e4 ♕f6 32 h5 1-0

Keres: The Eternal Number Two

A dynamic player who deserves special attention is the Estonian Paul Keres. As a young teenager I was very impressed by the German edition of Keres's book on the best games of his early career, *Ausgewählte Partien 1931-1958*, which my chess club had in its library. I liked the dynamic nature of Keres's games and even more so his instructive annotations.

Keres is difficult to place chronologically, since his career among the very best in the world spanned more than three decades. His international breakthrough came at the Chess Olympiad in Warsaw 1935, where he won the following famous game. It was a premonition of the rise of the Dynamic Era, to which Keres contributed greatly.

Keres – Winter
Warsaw Olympiad 1935

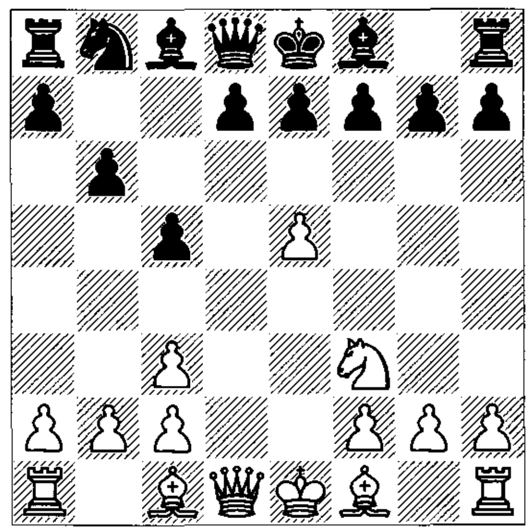
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6

Nimzowitsch's pet move, which is similar to the Alekhine Defence 1 e4 ♘f6. Black lures White's central pawns forward, hoping to be able to undermine them.

3 e5 ♘d5 4 ♘c3 e6

Nimzowitsch preferred 4...♘xc3 5 dxc3 b6 *(D)* here.

W



He won a good game against Michell in Marienbad 1925 after 6 ♗d3 ♗b7 7 ♗f4 ♕c7 8 ♗g3 e6 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 ♘d2 h5! 11 h3 g5! 12 ♗e4 ♘c6 13 ♖e1 0-0-0. However, 5...b6? is a serious mistake, as was demonstrated by perhaps the most brilliant heir of Nimzowitsch's system in a game 20 years later: 6 e6! dxe6 (6...fxe6 loses to 7 ♘e5 g6 8 ♕f3) 7 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 8 ♘e5! ♔e8 9 ♗b5+ ♗d7 10 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 11 ♗f4 e5 12 0-0-0! f6 13 ♗xd7+ 1-0 Petrosian-Grigoriev, Tbilisi 1945. However, Winter's move also doesn't equalize, and today the entire variation has been largely abandoned.

5 ♘xd5 exd5 6 d4 d6 7 ♗g5! ♕a5+

As Keres points out in his notes, 7...♗e7?! 8 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 9 dxc5, followed by 10 ♕xd5, and 7...♕b6 8 dxc5 ♕xc5 9 ♗d3 both favour White.

8 c3 cxd4 *(D)*

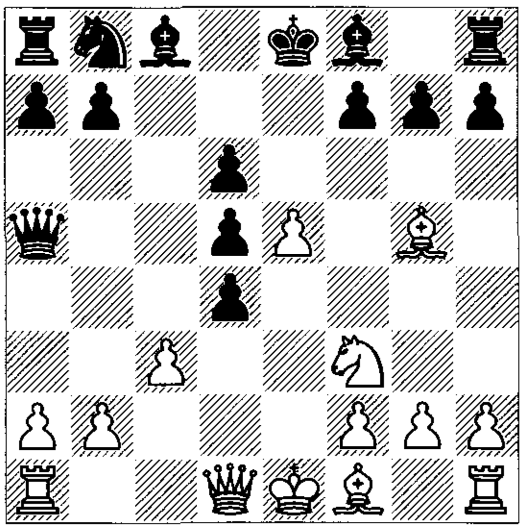
9 ♗d3!

Dynamic chess! The young Keres – 19 years old – is not satisfied with the solid positional edge after 9 ♕xd4 ♘c6 10 ♕e3 ♗e6. He strives for active piece-play, in the spirit of Alekhine and Tal!

9...dxc3 10 0-0 cxb2 11 ♖b1 dxe5?

Keres labels this the decisive mistake, and from a contemporary perspective this move

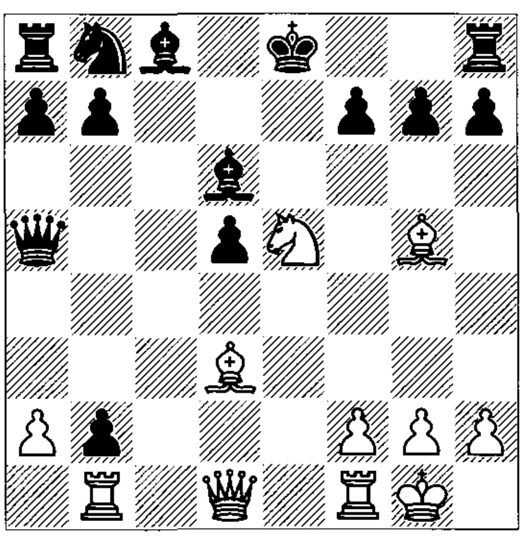
W



indeed looks grim, as it allows White's pieces free access to Black's lonely king. However, even the better 11...♘c6 12 ♖e1 ♗e6 13 ♖xb2 dxe5 14 ♘xe5 ♗b4 is not sufficient, because White has 15 ♘xf7! (Keres) with a strong attack after either 15...♔xf7 16 ♕h5+ g6 17 ♕f3+ or 15...♗xe1 16 ♘xh8 with the threat of 17 ♕h5+.

12 ♘xe5 ♗d6 *(D)*

W



13 ♘xf7!

One of the key learning points of dynamism is that material doesn't matter in such positions, but activity does! Black is underdeveloped, while all White's pieces participate in the attack. There is no defence.

13...♔xf7 14 ♕h5+ g6

14...♔e6 loses prosaically to 15 ♗f5+! ♔xf5 16 ♗d2+, while 14...♔f8 is met by 15 ♖fe1 ♗d7 16 ♖e3 ♔g8 17 ♖f3 and White wins.

15 ♗xg6+ hxg6 16 ♕xh8 ♗f5 17 ♖fe1! ♗e4

17...♗xb1 18 ♕f6+ ♔g8 19 ♖e8+ mates.

18 ♖xe4!? dxe4 19 ♕f6+ 1-0

Black could have prolonged his resistance, but in the forced variation 19...♔g8 (19...♔e8 20 ♕e6+ ♔f8 21 ♗h6#) 20 ♕xg6+ ♔f8 21 ♕xd6+ ♔f7 22 ♕f6+ ♔g8 23 ♕g6+ ♔f8 24 ♗h6+ ♔e7 25 ♕xe4+, White wins the house.

Keres never made it to World Champion, nor did he even qualify for a World Championship match. He finished second in four Candidates tournaments: behind Smyslov in 1953 and 1956, Tal in 1959, and Petrosian in 1962. All of these players went on to become World Champions by beating Botvinnik in the subsequent match for the highest crown, although Smyslov and Tal had to hand the title back to the 'Patriarch' just a year later.

Why didn't Keres make it to the top? Several attempts have been made to answer this question. Upon his death in 1975, his greatest postwar rival, Botvinnik, remarked: "At another time Paul would probably have become world champion. However, in the 1940s-1950s he could become this only by pushing aside the author of these lines ... What did he lack, to reach the very top in chess? I think that at critical moments Paul lacked strength of character. When he experienced great pressure, he simply played below his capabilities." This may be so, but personally I lean more towards Spassky's explanation. Once, while giving a lecture in front of a large audience in Soviet times, Spassky made a remark which did not please the Soviet leaders: "Keres, like his home country, was not favoured by fate." Spassky referred to Estonia's inclusion into the Soviet Union in connection with World War II, and just like his native country, Keres suffered badly from the consequences of the war. Before the war, he was a key contender for Alekhine's throne, having won the prestigious AVRO tournament in Holland in 1938, one of the strongest double-round robin tournaments of all time, together with another young star, the American Reuben Fine, and ahead of Botvinnik, World Champion Alekhine, Euwe, Reshevsky, Capablanca and Flohr. Keres also had other fine results to his name in that period, including Margate 1939 and a match win 7½-6½ over ex-world champion Euwe in 1939/40. He would have been a worthy challenger for Alekhine, and I believe he would have had good chances in a match against the ageing World Champion. However, the war changed all that. Not only did Keres lose 'the spirit of the moment'; when he and his country

involuntarily 'enrolled' into the Soviet Union, he had to accept that Botvinnik was considered the main Soviet asset and was given extensive support. While Keres was still a strong world championship contender even after the war – and for the next two decades – I believe his best chance to become World Champion vanished with the outbreak of the war.

But let us stray away from the psychological and political mutterings and look at two typical Keres games in which his excellent sense of the dynamic features of the position are highlighted. They are both Ruy Lopez games, an opening Keres played throughout his career. He was an expert of the black side of the Closed Ruy Lopez and contributed greatly to the development and continued popularity of this classical opening.

Levenfish – Keres

Leningrad-Moscow 1939

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 a4!?

A rare alternative to 9 h3, but not without venom.

9...b4

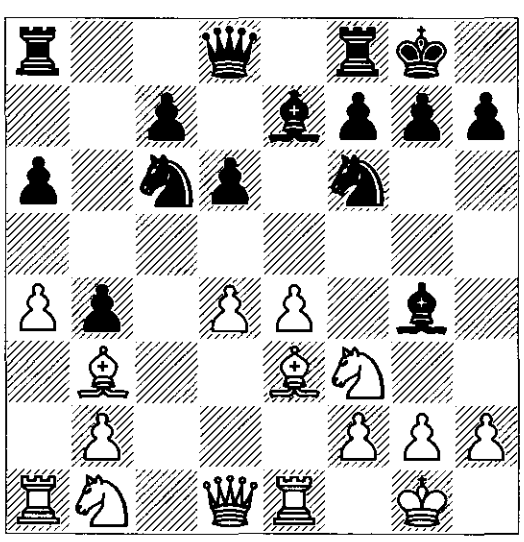
A solid alternative is 9...♗d7, which I played against Short at the 1994 Olympiad in Moscow. Although I lost that game, it was not because of the opening.

10 d4

10 a5 is more popular these days.

10...exd4 11 cxd4 ♗g4 12 ♗e3 *(D)*

B



12...♘a5!

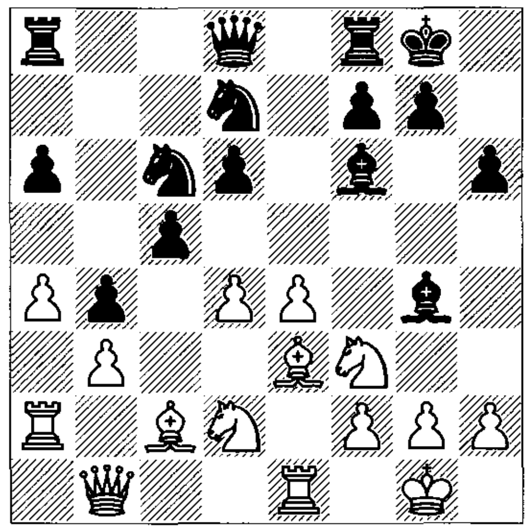
Keres's novelty. A few rounds before this game, the Estonian ran into trouble and eventually lost against Ragozin after 12...d5 (a typical thrust in the Ruy Lopez) 13 e5 ♘e4 14 a5 ♘a7 15 ♘bd2 ♔h8 16 ♗f4 f5?! 17 exf6 ♗xf6 18 ♘xe4 dxe4 19 ♖xe4, and Black's compensation proved insufficient. The text-move initiates a different plan which is now standard in many Ruy Lopez positions: Black plays for control of the dark squares in the centre.

13 ♗c2 c5 14 b3 ♘d7! 15 ♘bd2 ♗f6!

Black consistently targets the dark squares.

16 ♕b1 h6 17 ♖a2 ♘c6 *(D)*

W



The critical moment in the game. How should White resolve the situation in the centre?

18 ♗f4?

This fails to meet the requirement of the position. 18 e5 is well met by 18...cxd4 and 18 d5 ♘d4 is fine for Black, but the correct approach was the positional pawn sacrifice 18 dxc5 dxc5 19 e5!, when White is fine after 19...♘cxe5 20 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 21 ♗h7+ ♔h8 22 ♗f5 ♗xf5 23 ♕xf5. Black cannot hold on to his extra pawn with c5 blockaded on a dark square. Rather than attempting to go for the pawn, perhaps Black should simply play 19...♘dxe5 20 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 21 ♗xc5 ♖e8 with just an edge for White.

18...♗xf3!

In the battle for supremacy of the dark squares, a knight is more useful than a bishop.

19 ♘xf3 ♘xd4 20 ♗xd6 ♘xf3+ 21 gxf3 *(D)*

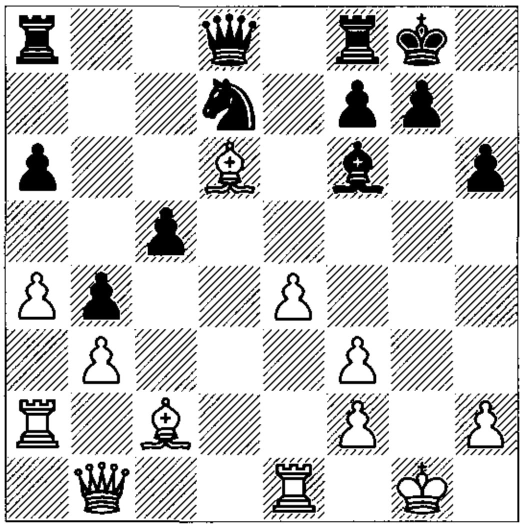
21...♗e5!

A powerful exchange sacrifice that highlights the deficiencies of the white position: too many pawns and pieces on light squares! After 21...♖e8 White would have time for 22 f4, taking control of e5.

22 ♗xf8 ♕h4?!

Keres flounders. Correct was 22...♕g5+ 23 ♔f1 (23 ♔h1? ♕f4) 23...♘xf8, and with the knight headed for d4 or f4, Black's supremacy

B



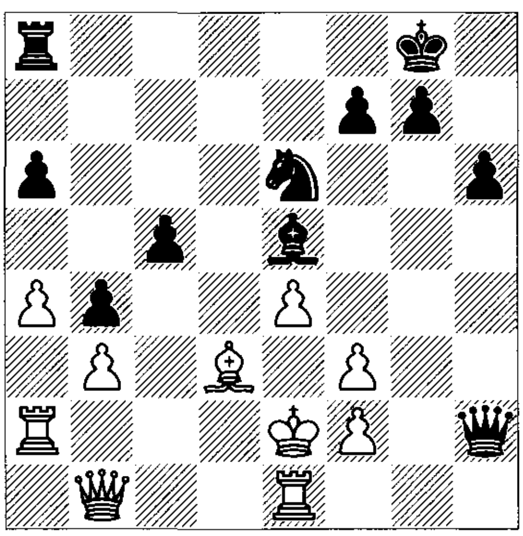
on the dark squares and the exposed white king leave White in deep trouble. Notice how useless the passive white rooks are. Rooks need open files to display their strength!

23 ♗d3?!

White repays the favour. The only chance to stay in the game was 23 ♗xg7! ♔xg7 24 ♔f1, when compared to the game White has some counterchances against Black's king.

23...♕xh2+ 24 ♔f1 ♘xf8 25 ♔e2 ♘e6 *(D)*

W



The triumph of Black's dark-square strategy. The knight and rook decisively enter the game.

26 ♗c4 ♘f4+ 27 ♔d1 ♖d8+ 28 ♗d5

28 ♔c1 ♗c3 29 ♖f1 ♕g2 is not much better.

28...♕g2! 29 ♖d2 ♕xf3+ 30 ♔c2 ♘xd5 31 exd5 ♗c3 32 ♖e3 ♕f5+ 33 ♖dd3 ♕xf2+ 34 ♔d1 f5!

As Kasparov used to say: "Pawns are attacking units too!"

35 ♕c1 f4 36 ♖e7 ♖d6!

Threatening 37...♖g6.

37 ♖e6 ♖xe6 38 dxe6 ♕e1+ 39 ♔c2 ♕e2+ 0-1

It is worth noting that over the course of his career Keres's style evolved; while he remained a dynamic player, in the later stages of his career he adopted a more universal style of play – reminiscent of the players whom we shall discuss in the next chapter – than the sharp approach of his early years. This is probably one of the reasons why he managed to stay in the top five for so long: he continuously adapted his style to the new times.

Boleslavsky – Keres

Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 0-0 8 c3 d6 9 h3 ♘a5 10 ♗c2 c5 11 d4 ♕c7

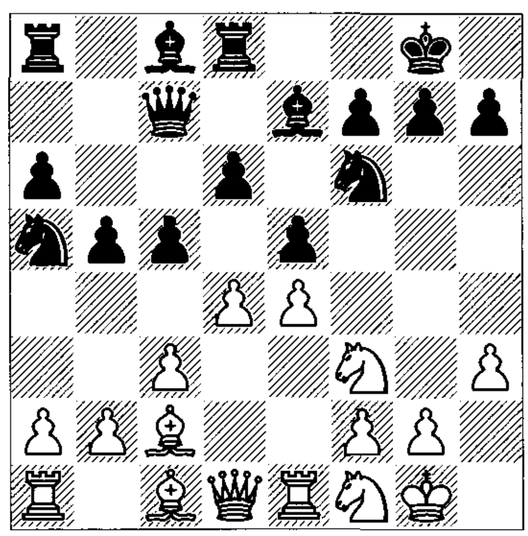
Keres also introduced 11...♘d7 into tournament practice. He played it twice against Fischer at the Candidates tournament in Curaçao 1962, winning one and losing one.

12 ♘bd2 ♖d8!?

A novel approach. Today the main lines continue 12...cxd4 13 cxd4 and now 13...♘c6 or 13...♗d7. I have tried both, with decent results.

13 ♘f1 *(D)*

B



13...d5?!

This was the idea behind the mysterious rook move on the previous turn. In the Ruy Lopez, Black is usually fine if he can push ...d5 without punishment. Later it was established that in this particular position the advance is premature, and Keres never employed it again. However, the surprise value must have been great, and in the subsequent dynamic complications Boleslavsky – a great theoretician who came close to a World Championship match against Botvinnik in 1951, losing a play-off against Bronstein by the smallest of margins – loses the thread of the game. In a later game against

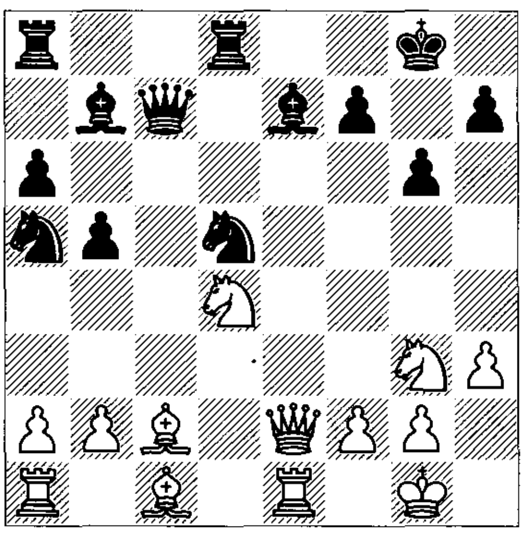
Nilsson (Amsterdam Olympiad 1954), Keres tried the same idea but in a slightly different fashion: after 13...cxd4 14 cxd4 d5!? 15 ♘xe5 dxe4 16 ♘g3 ♗d6 17 ♕e2 ♗xe5 18 dxe5 ♕xe5 19 ♘xe4 ♗f5 20 ♗g5 ♗xe4 21 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 22 ♗xe4 ♖ac8, the position was level and the game eventually drawn.

14 exd5?!

Later it was established that both 14 ♘xe5 ♘xe4 15 ♘g3! ♘xg3 16 fxg3 ♗d6 17 ♕d3 (Unzicker-Kokkoris, Varna Olympiad 1962) and 14 dxe5 dxe4 15 ♘1d2! exf3 16 exf6 ♗xf6 17 ♕xf3 ♗e6 18 ♘e4 ♗e7 19 ♕h5 (Vasiukov) are advantageous for White.

14...exd4! 15 cxd4 ♘xd5 16 ♕e2 ♗b7 17 ♘g3 cxd4 18 ♘xd4 g6 *(D)*

W



A complicated position with open piece-play – that suits a dynamic player like Keres! Despite the symmetrical pawn-structure, Black is already better; his pieces are much better coordinated and more active than their white counterparts. Compare the four bishops, for example!

19 ♗h6?!

A natural development move, but now things go from bad to worse. A quiet retreating move like 19 ♘f3 was better, preparing 20 ♗e4.

19...♗f6 20 ♘b3

20 ♖ad1 is simply met by 20...♘f4 21 ♗xf4 ♕xf4, when the two powerful bishops give Black a clear advantage.

20...♘c4

Now White cannot avoid losing a pawn.

21 ♘e4 ♗xb2 22 ♘bc5?

This seems somewhat desperate. However, after 22 ♖ad1 (22 ♖ab1 ♗c3! 23 ♖ed1 ♘a3 24 ♖bc1 ♗b2) 22...♘c3 23 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 (certainly not 23...♖xd8?? 24 ♘f6+ ♔h8 25 ♕e8+!, and White mates) 24 ♘f6+!? (after 24 ♘xc3 ♗xc3 White is just a pawn down for nothing) 24...♔h8 (24...♕xf6? 25 ♕e8+!) 25 ♕e7 ♕xe7 26 ♖xe7 ♘xa2! 27 ♖xb7 ♗xf6 28 ♖xf7 ♗c3, the ending should be winning for Black.

22...♗xa1

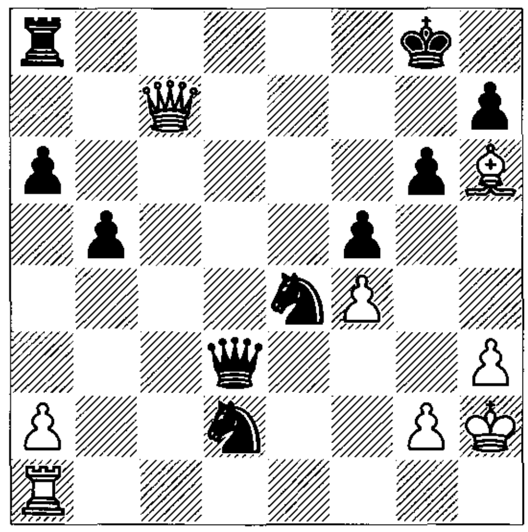
No fear of ghosts!

23 ♖xa1 f5! 24 ♘xb7 ♕xb7 25 ♘c5 ♕c6 26 ♘d3 ♘c3 27 ♕e1 ♕f6

Now Black is easily winning. The threat is 28...g5, trapping the bishop.

28 f4 ♘e4 29 ♔h2 ♕c3 30 ♕b1 ♘cd2 31 ♕c1 ♖xd3 32 ♗xd3 ♕xd3 33 ♕c7 *(D)*

B



A last attempt...

33...♘f3+! 0-1

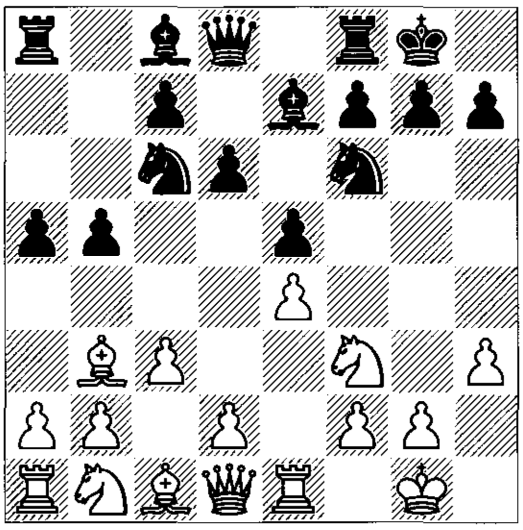
White is mated after 34 gxf3 ♕e2+ 35 ♔h1 ♕xf3+ or 34 ♔h1 ♘g3#. Notice how quickly White's position deteriorated. That often happens when you are unable to contain the dynamism of creative players – things may go downhill surprisingly fast.

As I discussed in *How Chess Games are Won and Lost*, identifying a number of 'master games' is often a good tool for learning an opening or generic type of position. When I decided to include the Ruy Lopez in my black repertoire in the early 1990s, I studied the games of a number of Ruy Lopez experts, including Keres. The two games above went into my Ruy Lopez master games database, and I occasionally look through these games as part of my pre-game preparation. Although the theoretical developments have overtaken the concrete opening moves, the fundamental ideas and manoeuvres remain essential for being able to handle the Ruy Lopez as Black. I have tried to put some of these ideas into my own Ruy Lopez practice. Here is an example.

Joecks – L.B. Hansen
2nd Bundesliga 1998/9

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 a5!? *(D)*

W



Another of Keres's old lines, which I have employed in a number of games and to good effect.

10 a4

10 d4 a4 11 ♗c2 ♗d7 is the other main line.

10...b4 11 d4 bxc3 12 bxc3

12 ♘xc3 ♘xd4 13 ♘xd4 exd4 14 ♕xd4 ♖b8 15 ♗c4 c6 16 ♕d1 ♘d7 17 ♗f4 ♘e5 18 ♗xe5 dxe5 19 ♕c2 ♗c5 20 ♖ad1 ♕g5 21 ♖d3! ♔h8 22 ♖f3 f5! 23 exf5 ♗xf5 24 ♖xe5! ♗xc2 25 ♖xg5 ♖xf3 26 gxf3 ♗b4 27 ♖e5 g6 28 ♖e2 ♗xc3 29 ♖xc2 ½-½ was Kotronias-L.B.Hansen, Stockholm 2006/7.

12...exd4 13 cxd4 d5!

Again this classical counter in the centre. Chances are about even.

14 e5

14 ♘c3!? dxe4 15 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 16 ♖xe4 ♖b8 17 ♗e3 ♘b4 18 ♘e5 ♗b7 19 ♖g4 ♗f6 was OK for Black in Joachim-L.B.Hansen, 2nd Bundesliga 1998/9, although White later won this sharp battle.

14...♘e4 15 ♘bd2 ♗f5 16 ♗a3 ♘b4 17 ♘f1 c5! 18 ♘e3 ♗e6 19 dxc5 ♗xc5

Black's active pieces more than compensate for the isolated d-pawn.

20 ♗b2 ♖b8 21 ♗d4?!

A natural move, but Black manages to break the blockade on d4. Since White's main problems stem from the vulnerable bishops on the b-file, he should play the prophylactic 21 ♖b1!.

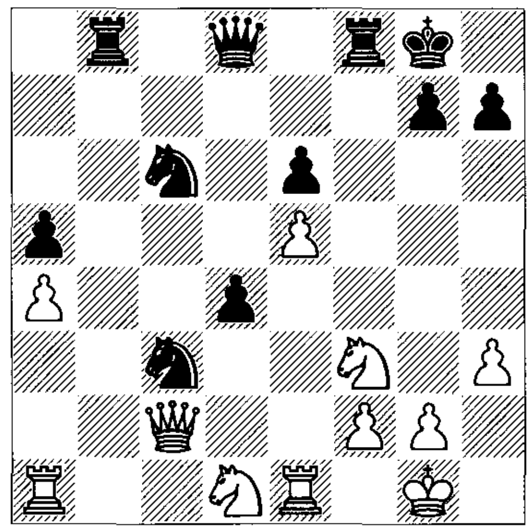
21...♗xd4 22 ♕xd4

22 ♘xd4 is strongly met by 22...♕h4!, when White has problems with f2 and e5.

22...♘c6 23 ♕d1 d4! 24 ♗xe6 fxe6 25 ♕c2 ♘c3 26 ♘d1?! *(D)*

White should play 26 ♘xd4! ♕xd4 27 ♖ac1, avoiding the exchange sacrifice, although Black has some initiative after 27...♕f4 28 ♕xc3 ♘xe5 (28...♕xf2+ 29 ♔h1 ♘b4 is met by 30 ♕c4, hitting the e6-pawn, but 28...♘d4!? is an interesting alternative).

B



26...♖xf3!

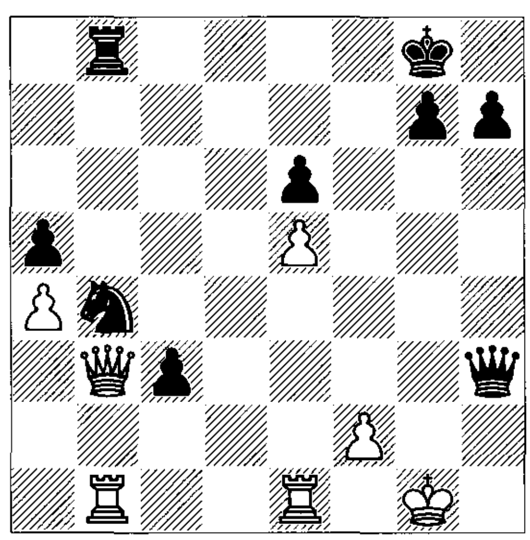
Inspiration from Levenfish-Keres! In return for the exchange, Black obtains a powerful long-term initiative.

27 gxf3 ♕g5+ 28 ♔h1 ♘b4 29 ♕b3 ♕f5?!

Not bad, but 29...♘cd5! is even stronger, as it leaves the white knight stranded on d1.

30 ♘xc3 ♕xf3+ 31 ♔g1 ♕xh3! 32 ♖ab1 ♕g4+ 33 ♔f1 ♕h3+ 34 ♔g1 dxc3! *(D)*

W



There is no need to take the perpetual check. White's rooks are passive, so Black runs no risk in continuing the game, even if White will win the c3-pawn.

35 ♖e3! ♕g4+ 36 ♖g3 ♕f5 37 ♖xc3 ♖f8! 38 ♖b2 ♘d5 39 ♖g3 ♕xe5 40 ♖b1?

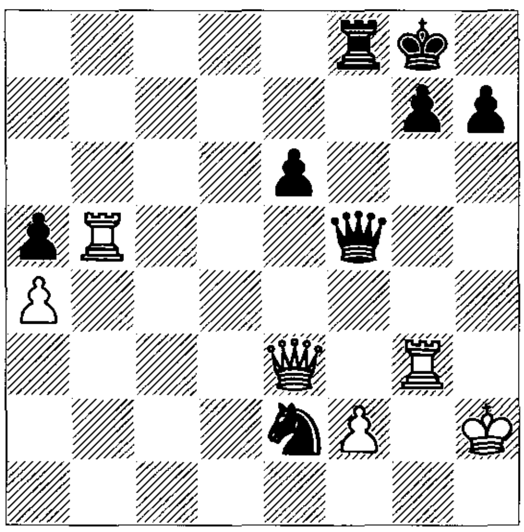
The infamous last move before the time-control! This rook should not abandon the coverage of e2 and f2. Correct was 40 ♕c2, after which Black may have an edge but the game is still very much in progress.

40...♘f4 41 ♕e3 ♘e2+ 42 ♔h2 ♕f5!

Maybe White missed this *zwischenzug* that hits the rook on b1.

43 ♖b5 *(D)*

B



43...♘xg3!

Or maybe this – Black threatens a fork on f1.

44 ♔xg3 ♕g6+ 45 ♖g5 ♕b1 46 ♔g2 ♖f6 47 ♖xa5 ♖g6+ 48 ♔f3 ♕d1+ 49 ♕e2 ♖f6+ 0-1

Black wins after 50 ♔e3 ♕b3+.

Tal: Unbridled Dynamism

That brings us to the most dynamic player of all – The Magician from Riga, Mikhail Tal! Although Tal held the World Championship for only one year – 1960-1 – his impact on chess was gigantic. He attracted followers from all over the world and in some sense can be said to form a bridge between Alekhine and the modern way of chess that I call Creative Concreteness.

Tal's fierce attacks and breathtaking combinations have led some chess-players to believe that Tal was a calculating machine. However, as I argued in *Foundation of Chess Strategy*, I don't think that is an appropriate way of describing the process of Tal's decision-making, and I have the support of an expert who should know what he is talking about. In *My Great Predecessors, Volume 2*, Kasparov explains: "Tal is the only player I can remember who did not calculate lengthy variations: he simply saw through them!" In other words, while some attacking players (the ones that I call 'pragmatics') reach decisions by calculating *forward*, Tal (and other activists such as Shirov) rather makes decisions by calculating *backwards* – from combination to variation. You may say that they see combinative possibilities in flashes and then deduce their way backwards to the concrete move in the position at hand.

Tal conceptualized attacking play by inventing notions such as 'launching' and 'Attacking Ratio'. *Launching* means manoeuvring pieces towards the vicinity of the enemy king, thus increasing the *Attacking Ratio*, which is the number of attacking pieces relative to defensive pieces. The higher the Attacking Ratio, the more likely it is that the attack will break through. As I have already discussed in *Foundations of Chess Strategy* and *How Chess Games are Won and Lost*, Alekhine and Tal, two of the most fearful attackers of all time, both used the concept of Attacking Ratio brilliantly, but in different ways. Whereas Alekhine often used shrewd strategic manoeuvres to lure defensive pieces away from the king, Tal had a more straightforward approach: as many pieces to the kingside (or wherever the enemy king is located) as possible, as quickly as possible! Let's see some Tal games with the Attacking Ratio in action.

Tal – Smyslov

Candidates tournament,
Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade 1959

1 e4 c6 2 d3!?

A rare alternative to the 'automatic' 2 d4, but not without venom. The line was also occasionally used by Fischer.

2...d5 3 ♘d2 e5

A solid alternative is 3...g6.

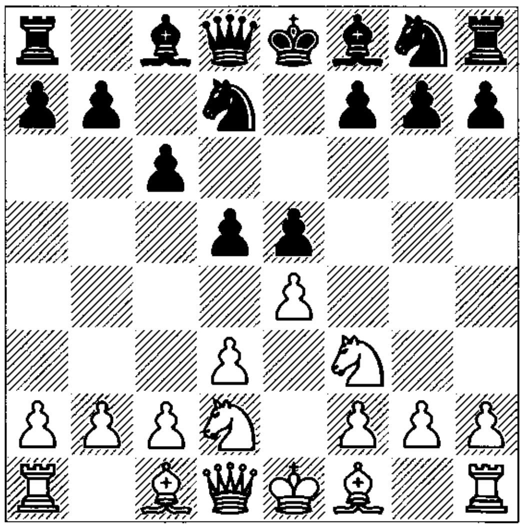
4 ♘gf3 ♘d7?! *(D)*

It is now known that 4...♗d6 is more circumspect.

5 d4!

Tal sees a chance to take the game into an open position, in which Black's knight on d7 disturbs the harmonious development of his pieces. Later the idea of d3-d4 against a misplaced knight on d7 became a standard concept in the line – an example is Fischer-Marovic, Rovinj/Zagreb 1970, which went 3 ♘d2 ♘d7 4

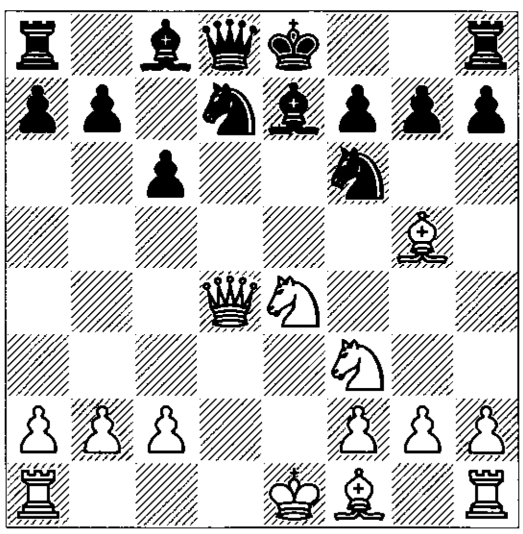
W



♘gf3 ♕c7 5 exd5! cxd5 6 d4! with an edge for White.

5...dxe4 6 ♘xe4 exd4 7 ♕xd4 ♘gf6 8 ♗g5 ♗e7 *(D)*

W



9 0-0-0?!

Typical Tal! I am sure that most other grandmasters would choose the simple 9 ♘d6+, which secures White a solid endgame advantage based on the two strong bishops after 9...♗xd6 10 ♕xd6 ♕e7+ (10...♘e4 11 ♗xd8 ♘xd6 12 ♗c7 doesn't fundamentally change the position) 11 ♕xe7+ ♔xe7 12 0-0-0. How should we evaluate Tal's choice? Since it eventually led to a brilliant win in this game, it is hard to condemn his decision, and indeed Kasparov explains: "Tal, with amazing psychological insight, unusual for one so young *[22 years old at the time]*, guessed that Smyslov would feel more confident in an inferior endgame than in a double-edged middlegame, and he decided to keep the queens on." Still, it seems to me that – with the clarity of history and hindsight – the decision may also be seen in a different light. It highlights what later was to become Tal's Achilles' Heel compared to more universal players: that he would sometimes overstep the mark in his search for dynamic possibilities. It worked here but it would not always work. As Karpov remarked: "Gradually players became accustomed to his attacks; it can be said that Tal taught them to defend." In other words, the type of risks taken by Tal in this and other games early in his career, would not necessarily work later in his career, when the chess world had acquired a more nuanced understanding of dynamism. That's where the Universal Era differs from the Dynamic Era: the universal players would also play dynamically but would also be ready to play quietly and accept 'just' a safe endgame advantage when needed.

9...0-0 10 ♘d6 ♕a5

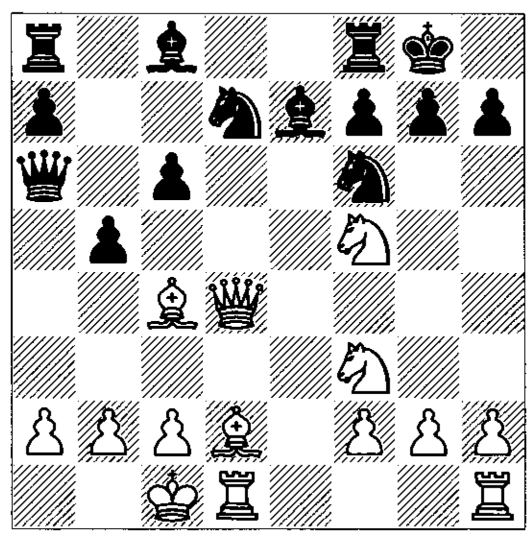
As Kasparov points out, Black is slightly better after 10...♘b6!? 11 ♘xc8 ♖xc8 12 ♕h4 ♘fd5!, and this is probably how Smyslov should have played, although his real mistake only comes later.

11 ♗c4 b5 12 ♗d2!

Not 12 ♗b3? c5 followed by 13...c4, and the bishop is trapped.

12...♕a6 13 ♘f5! *(D)*

B



13...♗d8!

Initially Smyslov defends well. This is stronger than 13...♗c5?!, which takes the bishop too far away from the kingside, thus handing White a huge lead in *Attacking Ratio* after 14 ♕h4. From d8 the bishop fortifies the f6-square.

14 ♕h4!

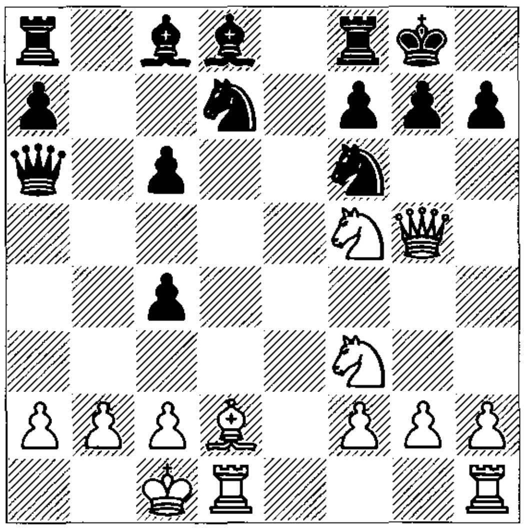
There is no turning back, as the bishop is still trapped after 14 ♗b3 c5.

14...bxc4 15 ♕g5 *(D)*

15...♘h5!

This position is extensively analysed by Kasparov in *My Great Predecessors, Volume 2*, and his conclusion is that both the bold text-move

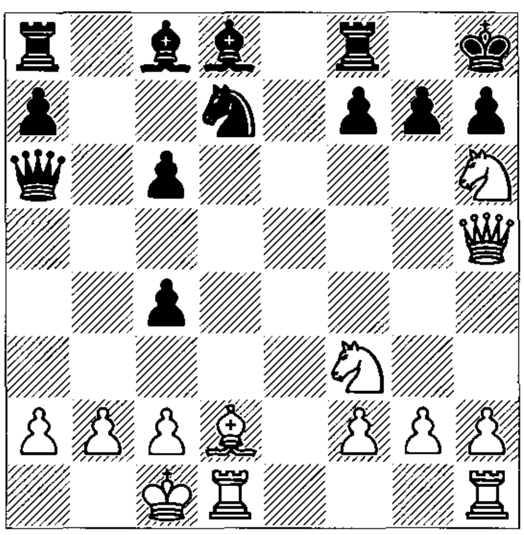
B



and the safer 15...g6 are sufficient for Black to maintain the balance and obtain equality. After 15...g6 Kasparov's main line is 16 ♘h6+ (16 ♗c3 ♕xa2 17 ♕h6 gxf5 18 ♖xd7! ♗xd7 19 ♕g5+ ♔h8 20 ♗xf6+ ♗xf6 21 ♕xf6+ ♔g8 22 ♕g5+ is only perpetual check) 16...♔g7 17 ♗c3 ♕b5! 18 h4 ♖e8 19 ♘g4 ♕f5! 20 ♘h6! ♕c5! 21 ♘g4 ♕f5, with a draw by repetition.

16 ♘h6+ ♔h8 17 ♕xh5 *(D)*

B



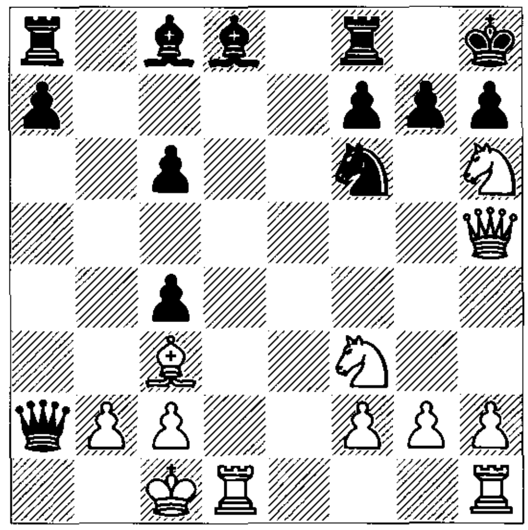
17...♕xa2!

Again Smyslov proves to be on top of the situation. The text-move is better than 17...♗f6 18 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 19 ♘7g5 h6 20 ♘e4 ♕xa2 21 ♘xf6+ ♘xf6 22 ♕a5 ♕xa5 23 ♗xa5 with a preferable endgame for White (Kasparov).

18 ♗c3 ♘f6?? *(D)*

Oh no! After defending so well for a long time, Smyslov flounders. This was typical for Tal's opponents, just as for Alekhine's 30 years earlier. Withstanding the pressure for hours was a daunting task, and often it was simply impossible even for the best in the world. Correct was 18...♗c7! (Kasparov; 18...♗f6! is also a good defence), and now White has no better than a repetition after 19 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 20 ♘h6+ ♔h8 21 ♘f7+, since 19 ♕h4?! fails to 19...f6 20 ♔d2 ♕a6 21 ♖he1 ♕b5! 22 ♖e7?! ♕c5! 23 ♖de1?! ♕d6+ 24 ♔c1 ♕f4+, and Black wins. If White wants to continue the game after 18...♗c7, he will have to go for the highly unclear 19 g3 ♘f6 20 ♕h4 ♗g4!.

W



Now, on the other hand, the game finishes abruptly. Notice that the Attacking Ratio on the kingside is in White's favour, which always increases the likelihood of tactical shots.

19 ♕xf7!

Ouch!

19...♕a1+

19...♖xf7 allows a nice *smothered mate* by 20 ♖xd8+ ♘g8 21 ♘xf7#, as does 19...♖e8 20 ♕g8+! ♘xg8 21 ♘f7#.

20 ♔d2 ♖xf7

Or 20...♕xd1+ 21 ♖xd1 ♖xf7 22 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 23 ♘xd8, and White wins.

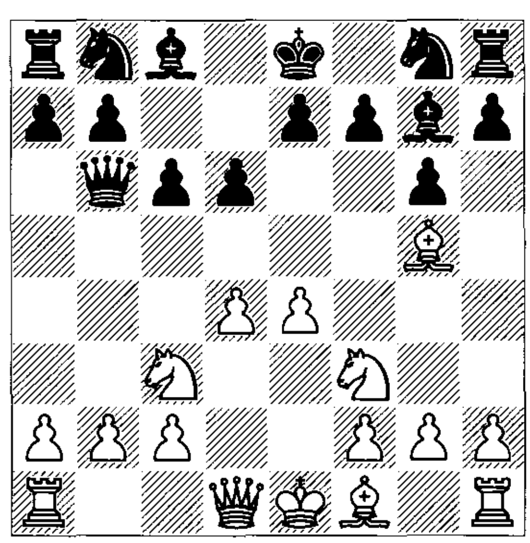
21 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 22 ♖xa1 ♔xf7 23 ♘e5+ ♔e6 24 ♘xc6 ♘e4+ 25 ♔e3 ♗b6+ 26 ♗d4! 1-0

Tal – Tringov

Amsterdam Interzonal 1964

1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 ♘c3 d6 4 ♘f3 c6 5 ♗g5 ♕b6 *(D)*

W



6 ♕d2

Of course – Tal was not the kind of player to bother about such a pawn, even if (or perhaps rather 'because') this was the decisive last round! 30 years later, Judit Polgar chose the calm 6 ♖b1 against Shirov (Linares 1994), and after 6...♗g4 7 ♗e3 ♗xf3 8 gxf3 ♕c7 9 h4 e6 10 h5 d5 11 ♕d2 ♘d7 12 b4 ♘gf6 13 h6 ♗f8 a double-edged position arose which Black eventually won.

6...♕xb2

Maybe Black should leave this pawn alone, but in that case 5...♕b6 doesn't make much sense.

7 ♖b1 ♕a3 8 ♗c4 ♕a5 9 0-0

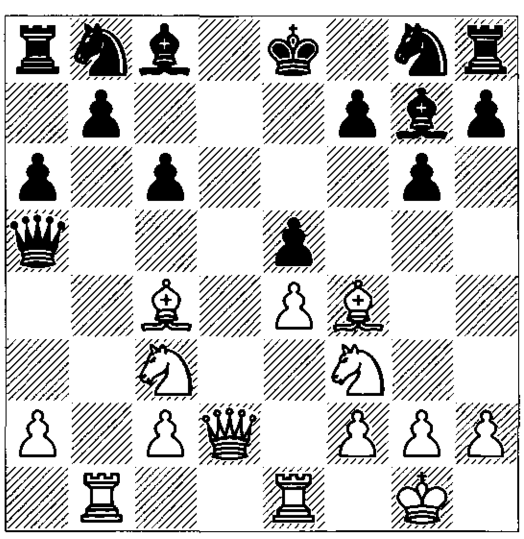
Tarrasch claimed that three tempi for development were sufficient for a pawn. Here it is even more, so Black ought to be in trouble. Still, his position is solid, and it takes some tactical shots to break down his fortress.

9...e6?! 10 ♖fe1 a6 11 ♗f4! e5?!

Now the position opens up, and White's lead in development begins to tell. 11...b5 could simply be met by 12 ♗xd6 bxc4 13 ♗xb8 with a clear edge, but perhaps Black should try to keep the position closed by 11...♕c7 or 11...♕d8.

12 dxe5 dxe5 *(D)*

W



13 ♕d6!

A brilliant piece sacrifice that closes in on Black's uncastled king. Notice that once more the Attacking Ratio is clearly to White's advantage, in this case because Black has neglected development.

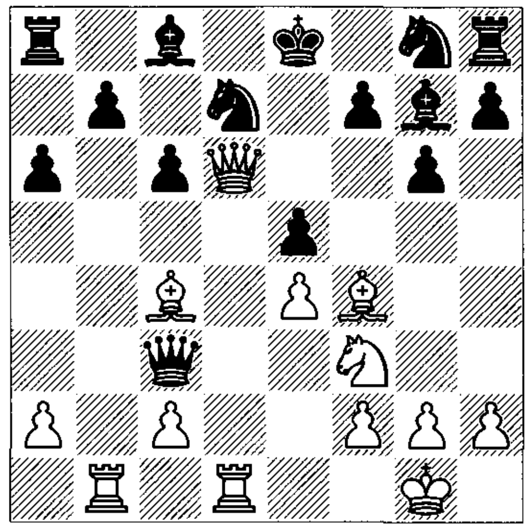
13...♕xc3

The Bulgarian grandmaster allows Tal to demonstrate the main line. 13...exf4 14 ♘d5! and 13...f6 14 ♖xb7! ♗xb7 15 ♕e6+ ♘e7 (or 15...♔d8 16 ♖d1+) 16 ♕f7+ ♔d8 17 ♖d1+ ♘d7 18 ♗e6 ♗c8 19 ♕xg7 are also hopeless for Black.

14 ♖ed1 ♘d7 *(D)*

This allows mate, but 14...♗f6 15 ♗xe5 ♕xc4 16 ♗xf6 ♘d7 17 ♗xh8 is no better.

W



15 ♗xf7+! ♔xf7

Or 15...♔d8 16 ♘g5 and mate on e6.

16 ♘g5+ ♔e8 17 ♕e6+ 1-0

Black resigned, as he will be mated after 17...♘e7 18 ♕f7+ ♔d8 19 ♘e6# or 17...♔d8 18 ♘f7+ ♔c7 19 ♕d6#. Nice geometrical motifs!

Tal knew only one way – forward! As we saw in the above game, even in decisive games he didn't hold back – on the contrary. Another example is the 10th and last game of his Candidates semi-final in 1965 against Larsen. The score was tied 4½-4½, and the winner would earn a match against Spassky for the chance to challenge the reigning champion, Petrosian. Some might have gone for a safe pull as White, but Tal went all-out, with the risk that such an approach entails. In a chapter entitled 'The Dream of Becoming World Champion' in the Danish book *Bogen om Skak* (The Book of Chess), Larsen recalls: "The match against Tal, which I lost 4½-5½, was nerve-wrecking. I won the 1st and 5th games, he the 2nd and 6th, and then the match was decided in the 10th game, in which the 'The Magician from Riga' played a promising piece sacrifice which subsequent analyses seem to indicate as correct. However, if in a particular position I had defended differently, it was Tal's intention to proceed with the attack in a manner that would have given me the better chances. So if..." And this is Tal's style in a nutshell – this unbridled

dynamism that was impossible for the opponent to control at the board. In subsequent analysis, yes, but not at the board with the clock ticking!

Tal – Larsen

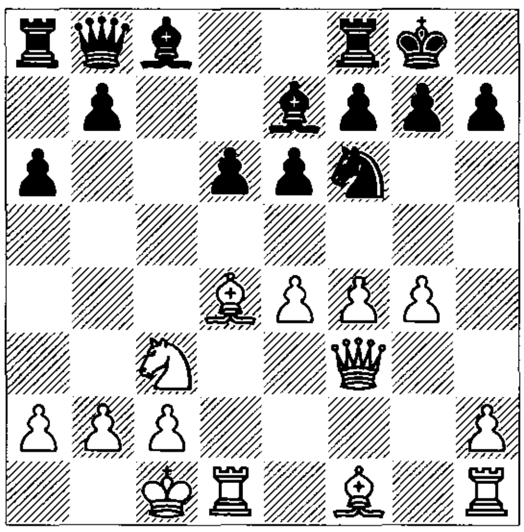
Candidates match (game 10), Bled 1965

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗e3 ♘f6 7 f4 ♗e7 8 ♕f3!?

A sharp continuation, well suited to Tal's style.

8...0-0 9 0-0-0 ♕c7 10 ♘db5 ♕b8 11 g4 a6 12 ♘d4 ♘xd4 13 ♗xd4 *(D)*

B



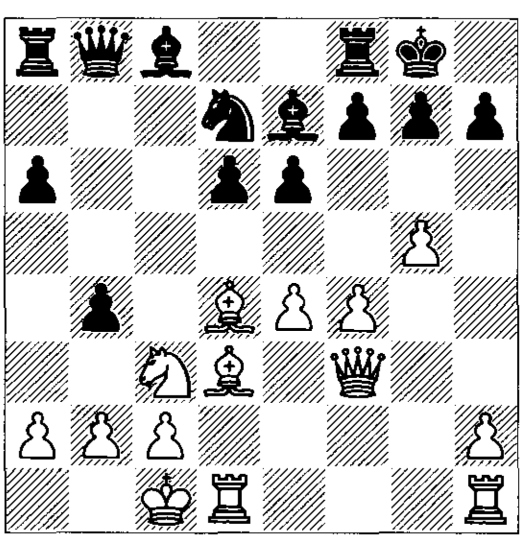
The first critical position in the game.

13...b5!?

According to Kasparov, Black could equalize by 13...e5! 14 g5 ♗g4 15 ♕g3 exd4 (not 15...♗xd1? 16 gxf6 ♗xf6 17 ♘d5, winning) 16 gxf6 dxc3 17 fxe7 cxb2+ 18 ♔b1 ♗xd1 19 exf8♕+ ♕xf8 20 ♖g1 g6! 21 ♕d3 ♗h5 22 ♕d5! ♕h6 followed by 23...♖f8. However, Larsen's move is fine too.

14 g5 ♘d7 15 ♗d3 b4 *(D)*

W

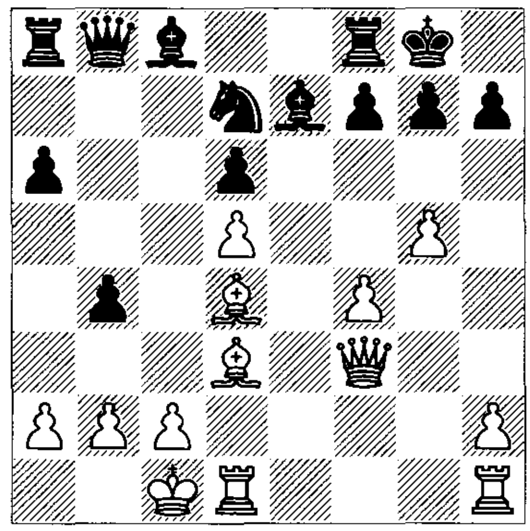


16 ♘d5?!

There it is, the infamous knight sacrifice that brings back to memory Tal's stunning knight sacrifice in the 6th game of the first World Championship match against Botvinnik. Is it correct? Despite the quote by Larsen above, subsequent analysis has indicated that it is not. However, the lines are so difficult to see through that the sacrifice makes sense – the passive 16 ♘e2 e5! is fine for Black.

16...exd5 17 exd5 *(D)*

B



17...f5?!

Larsen falters; however, this merely transforms the position from better for Black to roughly equal. After 17...g6! Larsen's dream of becoming World Champion would have been one step closer to fulfilment – he would have had all chances to win the game and the match (although he would have had a hard time in the final against Spassky, who in the mid- to late 1960s was at the height of his powers). Kasparov, in *My Great Predecessors*, gives the main line (leaving out the extensive body of subvariations) 18 ♖de1! ♗d8 19 ♕h3 ♘e5! 20 ♕h6 ♗b6! 21 fxe5 ♗xd4 22 ♖e4! ♗f2! 23 e6 fxe6 24 dxe6, and now Black has the pleasant choice between 24...♗b7 25 e7 ♗xe4 26 exf8♕+ ♕xf8 27 ♕xf8+ ♖xf8 28 ♗xe4 ♗e3+ 29 ♔d1 ♗xg5 with a healthy extra pawn, and 24...d5 25 ♖e2 ♕a7 26 ♗xg6 hxg6 27 ♕xg6+ ♕g7 28 ♕xg7+ ♔xg7 29 e7 ♖e8 30 ♖xf2 ♖xe7, when Black should win.

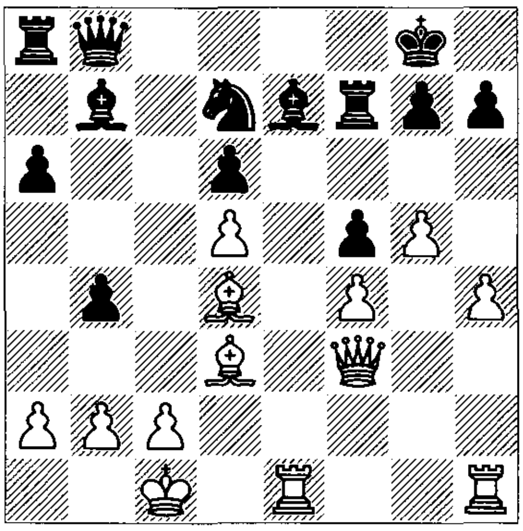
18 ♖de1! ♖f7?

One mistake rarely comes alone – and this time it is much more severe. With 18...♗d8! Black could still obtain comfortable equality; e.g., 19 ♕h5 (better than 19 ♗xg7!? ♔xg7 20 ♕h5 ♖g8! 21 ♗xf5 ♘f8, when Black has good chances to repel the attack – Kasparov) 19...♘c5

20 ♗xg7! ♘xd3+ 21 ♔b1! (21 cxd3? ♕c7+) 21...♕c7! (not 21...♘xe1? 22 g6 ♔xg7 23 ♕xh7+ ♔f6 24 g7 ♖f7? {24...♖e8 25 ♕h4+ ♔f7 26 ♕h5+ ♔f6 27 ♕xe8 also loses} 25 g8♘#) 22 ♗xf8 ♘xe1 23 ♖xe1 ♕f7 24 ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 25 ♗xd6 a5, and the ending is fine for Black.

19 h4! ♗b7 *(D)*

W



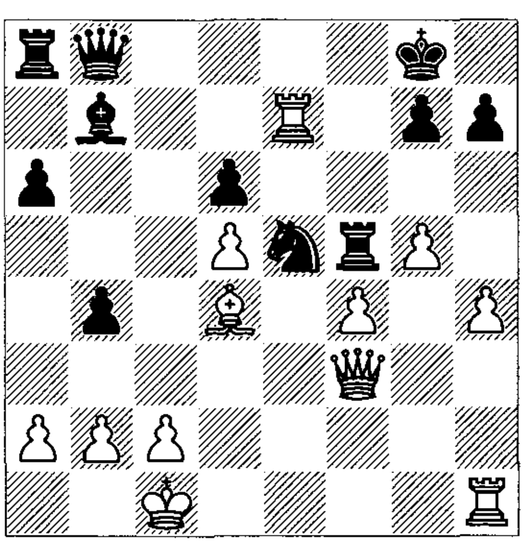
20 ♗xf5?!

Now it is Tal's turn to stumble. Although he maintains the better chances after the text-move, stronger was 20 g6! hxg6 21 h5! g5 22 ♗xf5! ♗f6 23 ♗e6 ♕f8. Tal had apparently seen this far, but "at the board I was unable to find a forced win" (Tal). However, as Kasparov points out, it doesn't take modern computer programs long to show that 24 ♗xf6 g4 25 ♕xg4 ♘xf6 26 ♕g5 ♔h8 27 ♗xf7 ♕xf7 28 h6 g6 29 f5! gxf5 (29...♘h7 30 ♕xg6 ♗xd5 31 ♖h4 a5 32 ♖d4 and White will win) 30 ♕g7+! ♕xg7 31 hxg7++ ♔xg7 32 ♖e7+ wins.

20...♖xf5 21 ♖xe7 ♘e5 *(D)*

21...♖f7 loses prosaically to 22 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 23 g6+! hxg6 24 h5 ♕g8 25 ♕e4 ♔f8 26 hxg6.

W

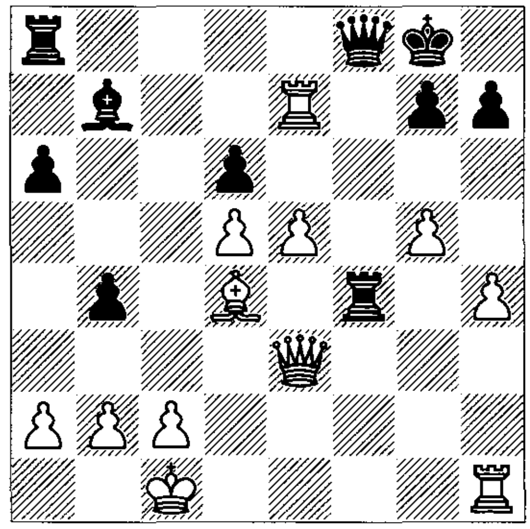


22 ♕e4 ♕f8!

Larsen finds the only chance. 22...♖f7? loses to 23 ♖xf7 ♘xf7 24 g6 hxg6 25 ♕xg6 ♕f8 26 ♖g1, and g7 falls.

23 fxe5 ♖f4 24 ♕e3 *(D)*

B



24...♖f3?

The final inaccuracy in time-pressure. A better chance was 24...♗xd5, although White has good chances to win after 25 exd6 ♖xd4 (25...♗xh1 26 ♖xg7+ ♕xg7 27 ♗xg7 ♖f1+ 28 ♔d2 ♔xg7 29 d7 ♖ff8 30 h5! ♔f7 31 ♕e5 ♖ad8 32 ♕f6+ wins for White) 26 ♕xd4! ♗xh1 27 b3! ♗f3 (27...♖e8? is met by 28 ♕xg7+!, as pointed out by Burgess) 28 ♕c4+ ♔h8 29 ♖f7 ♕xd6 30 ♖xf3 (Tal).

25 ♕e2 ♕xe7 26 ♕xf3 dxe5 27 ♖e1! ♖d8 28 ♖xe5 ♕d6 29 ♕f4 ♖f8

29...♗xd5? 30 ♖e8+!.

30 ♕e4 b3!?

A last desperate attempt to hang on to the dream... If White is allowed to play b3, his king is perfectly safe at b2.

31 axb3 ♖f1+ 32 ♔d2 ♕b4+ 33 c3 ♕d6 34 ♗c5!

A nice tactical shot to conclude this dramatic game.

34...♕xc5 35 ♖e8+ ♖f8 36 ♕e6+ ♔h8 37 ♕f7! 1-0

No one was able to stop Tal's meteoric ascent to the throne, but he stayed only briefly at the ultimate summit. As I have already mentioned, this was probably because he sometimes took dynamism too far when it was not needed. His predecessor, Max Euwe, aptly described Tal's strengths but also his main shortcoming: "It is evident that Tal has something from each of the previous World Champions. From Morphy – chess brilliance, from Steinitz

– something magic, from Lasker – the psychological approach, from Alekhine – unprecedented tempo play, and from Botvinnik – energy. Probably the only thing that he lacks is the calm common sense of Smyslov...” That’s an important learning point for dynamic players (and all others, for that matter): playing according to personal skills and interests is fine, but beware not to get carried away – remember to maintain some objectivity, or as Euwe calls it, “common sense”! Sometimes it is better to play – as Botvinnik called it – “by position”, accepting the need to play more quietly if that is what the position requires. Dwelling a little on learning, I shall next illustrate how a thorough study of dynamism helped me at a critical junction in my career.

Learning from New Dynamism

Around 1992-3 I made a big effort to get more dynamism into my play. At that time my Elo rating had stagnated in the low 2500s, and I was looking for ways to improve further. Dynamism came to the rescue. I studied some of the players presented in this chapter and the next one, ‘The Age of Universality’, and included 1 e4 in my opening repertoire for the first time. The effort paid off. My Elo went up from the low 2500s to just below 2600 within a year. I especially improved my play with the white pieces, where I now had more varied weapons at my disposal.

L.B. Hansen – Antonsen
Farum 1993

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♕b6 6 a3 ♘h6 7 b4 cxd4 8 cxd4 ♘f5 9 ♗e3!?

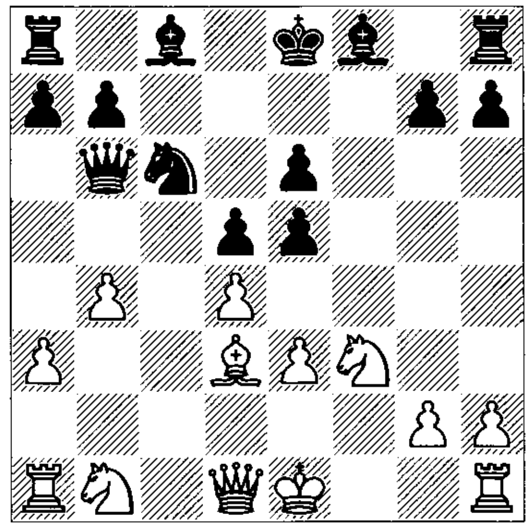
A rare but interesting alternative to the more common 9 ♗b2.

9...f6 10 ♗d3?!

A number of games have ended in draws after 10 b5 ♘xe5! 11 dxe5 ♘xe3 12 fxe3 ♕xe3+ 13 ♕e2 ♕c1+ 14 ♕d1 ♕e3+. The text-move is much more ambitious and entertaining, but probably not as good, as Black has found ways to take over the initiative. 10 exf6 has been tried in a few recent games, but without a great deal of success.

10...♘xe3 11 fxe3 fxe5 *(D)*

W



12 b5!

White’s point. The fight for the centre is on.

12...e4?!

Later games have shown that 12...♘xd4! is Black’s best here. 13 exd4 e4 14 ♗xe4 dxe4 15 ♘e5, and now:

a) 15...♗d7 16 ♕h5+? (16 0-0 0-0-0 has also been tested, without a clear assessment) 16...g6 17 ♘xg6 and now instead of 17...hxg6? with unclear play (Karttunen-Tella, Finnish League 2006/7), 17...0-0-0! 18 ♘xh8 ♕xd4 gives Black a crushing counterattack.

b) 15...♕a5+!? is a good alternative. Then 16 ♘d2 ♕c3! 17 0-0 ♕xd4+ 18 ♔h1 ♕xe5 19 ♘c4 ♕d5 20 ♕e2 ♗c5 21 ♖ad1 is a wild sequence that after 21...♗d4? 22 ♖f4! e5 23 ♖xe4 0-0 24 ♘xe5 ♗e6 25 ♖exd4 ♕a2 26 ♕xa2 ♗xa2 led to an even ending in Saldano-del Rio, Malaga 2004, but 21...♕g5 leaves White with insufficient compensation.

13 bxc6 ♗d6?!

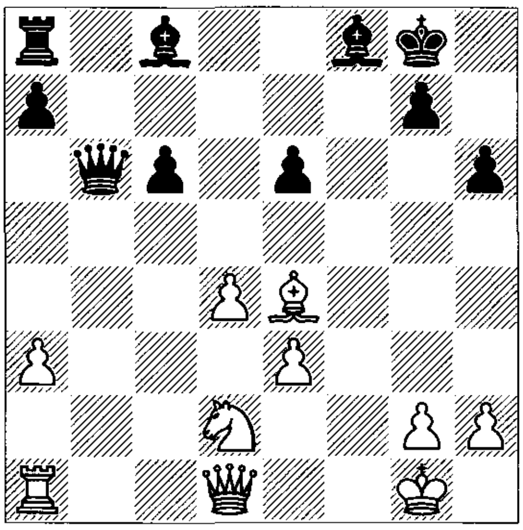
This is better than 13...exd3? 14 ♘e5 bxc6 15 ♕h5+ g6 16 ♘xg6 hxg6 17 ♕xh8 ♕c7 18 0-0 ♕g7 19 ♕h4, which gave White a decisive advantage in the stem game Prié-de la Villa, Leon 1991. However, it still does not solve all Black’s problems. Best is 13...♗e7! to keep the white knight out of g5, as suggested by Antonsen after the game.

14 0-0 0-0 15 ♘g5! h6

Forced, as 15...♖xf1+ 16 ♗xf1 leaves Black material down, and 15...exd3 loses to 16 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 (16...♗xf8 17 ♕h5 mates) 17 ♕f3+.

16 ♖xf8+ ♗xf8 17 ♘xe4! dxe4 18 ♗xe4 bxc6 19 ♘d2 *(D)*

B



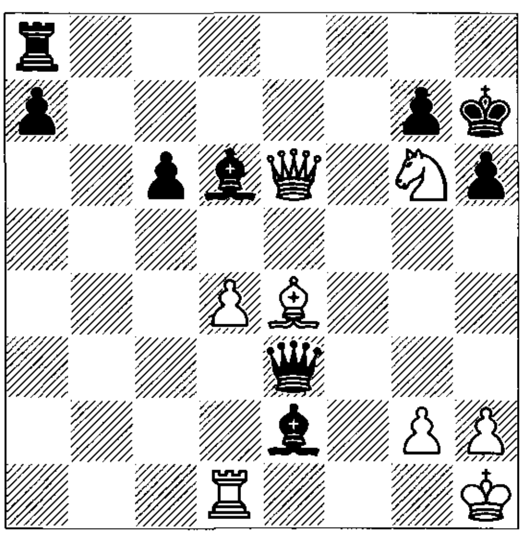
The smoke has cleared and White is positionally winning. There are too many holes in the black position.

19...♗a6 20 ♕g4! ♕b2 21 ♖d1 ♕xa3 22 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 23 ♕g6 ♔g8 24 ♘f3!

White brings another piece into the attack with lethal consequences.

24...♗d6 25 ♕e6+ ♔h8 27 ♘h4 ♕xe3+ 27 ♔h1 ♗e2 28 ♘g6+ ♔h7 29 ♕f5 ♔g8 30 ♕e6+ ♔h7 *(D)*

W



31 ♘e7+ ♔h8 32 ♕g6 1-0

White wins by force after 32...♕xe4 33 ♕xe4 ♗xd1 34 ♘g6+ ♔h7 (34...♔g8 35 ♕e6+) 35 ♘e5+ ♔g8 36 ♕xc6 ♖d8 (36...♖f8 37 ♕c4+) 37 ♕c4+ ♔h7 38 ♕d3+ ♔g8 39 ♕xd1 ♗xe5 40 ♕b3+! and 41 dxe5.

L.B. Hansen – Agrest
Stockholm 1993/4

This game was played in the penultimate round of the traditional Rilton Cup in Sweden. It was of vital importance for the final standings. My victory enabled me to tie for first together with the Swedish GMs Jonny Hector and Tiger Hillarp Persson.

1 d4 d6 2 ♘f3 ♗g4!?

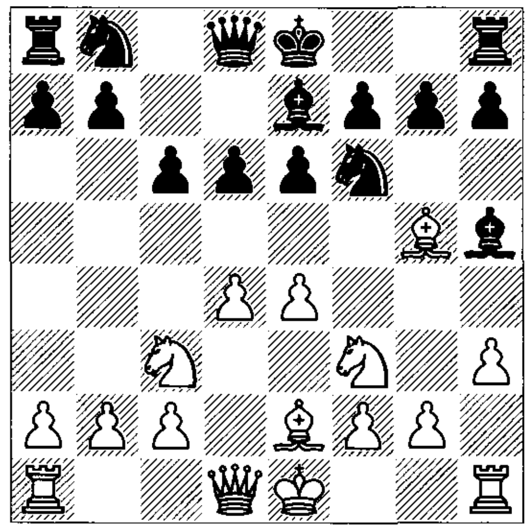
Leaving the well-trodden paths as early as move 2! While there is some theory regarding this move, it is nowhere near the amount on the main lines.

3 e4 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 h3 ♗h5 6 ♗g5

A sound and logical developing move, but probably not the most critical.

6...♗e7 7 ♗e2 c6 *(D)*

W



8 ♗xf6!?

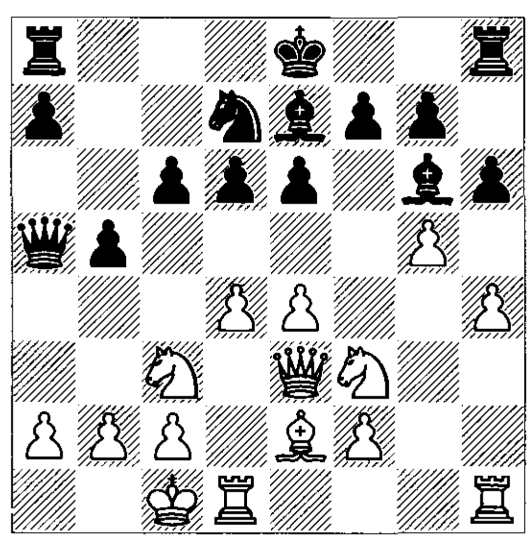
Initiating an interesting plan to gain space on the kingside. Having studied the players from New Dynamism, I wanted to grab the initiative!

8...♗xf6 9 g4 ♗g6 10 h4 h6 11 ♕d2 ♘d7 12 0-0-0 ♕a5 13 ♕e3 b5!

The battle lines are drawn, and now White must act fast.

14 g5 ♗e7 *(D)*

W



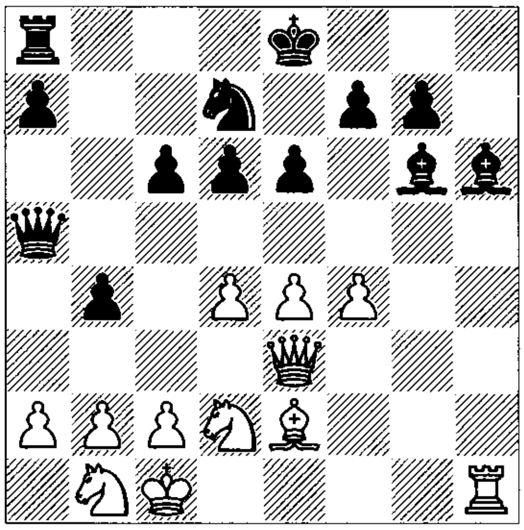
15 ♘d2!?

Sacrificing a pawn to secure the king's position and maintain the initiative.

15...b4 16 ♘cb1 hxg5 17 hxg5 ♖xh1 18 ♖xh1 ♗xg5 19 f4 ♗h6 *(D)*

20 ♖xh6! gxh6 21 f5 b3?!

W



A practical decision that Agrest made with little delay. Both players were approaching time-trouble. The idea behind the pawn sacrifice is to prevent White's d2-knight from entering the attack via c4 because of a queen check on e1. However, is this worth a pawn? I doubt it.

22 axb3 ♗h7 23 ♕xh6 ♘f8 24 fxe6 ♗g6!

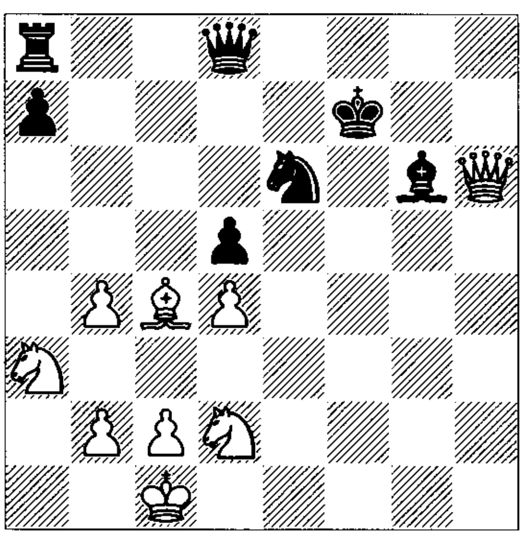
24...fxe6? loses to 25 ♗h5+.

25 exf7+ ♔xf7 26 ♘a3

The stronger 26 ♗c4+ d5 27 b4! ♕d8 28 ♗b3 leaves White better. The knight may then go to c3 instead.

26...♘e6 27 ♗c4 d5 28 b4! ♕d8 29 exd5 cxd5 *(D)*

W

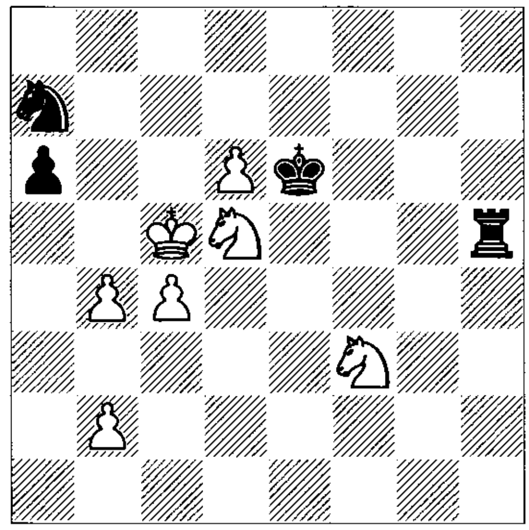


30 ♘f3! dxc4 31 ♘e5+ ♔g8 32 ♕xg6+ ♘g7 33 ♕f7+ ♔h7 34 ♕g6+ ♔g8 35 ♕f7+ ♔h7 36 ♕xc4 ♕g5+ 37 ♔b1

White is undoubtedly better with three pawns for the exchange and an exposed black king. However, Agrest puts up a tough fight.

37...♖d8 38 ♕d3+ ♔g8 39 ♔a2 ♕f4 40 ♕b3+ ♔h7 41 c3 ♕f5 42 ♘ac4 ♕e6 43 ♘a5 ♖d6 44 ♕xe6 ♘xe6 45 ♘ac6 a6 46 ♔b3 ♘c7 47 ♔c4 ♖h6 48 ♔c5 ♖h2 49 ♘c4 ♔g6 50 ♘6e5+ ♔f5 51 d5 ♘b5 52 ♘f3 ♖h5 53 ♘fd2 ♖h6 54 d6 ♔e6 55 ♘e4 ♖h8 56 ♘b6 ♔e5 57 c4 ♘a7 58 ♘g5 ♔f6 59 ♘f3 ♖h5+ 60 ♘d5+ ♔e6 *(D)*

W



61 ♔b6! ♘c8+ 62 ♔c7 ♘xd6 63 ♘d4+!

Bringing the knight closer to the queenside before taking the rook, just in case. The knight might be needed to blockade the a6-pawn. Black's only chance is to give up his knight for White's remaining pawns, leaving White with two knights vs a6-pawn. This square is behind the famous *Troitsky Line* (worked out by A. Troitsky and published in 1906), and so the position would be winning for White, provided the pawn is blockaded by one of the knights. However, in the last few minutes of the sudden death time-control, it would not be easy.

63...♔e5 64 ♘c6+! ♔e6

64...♔e4 65 ♔xd6 is easy.

65 ♘f4+ ♔f5 66 ♘xh5 ♘xc4 67 b3 ♘d2 68 ♘a5 ♔g5 69 ♔b6!

The simplest.

69...♔xh5 70 ♔xa6 ♘e4 71 b5 ♘c5+ 72 ♔a7 ♔g5 73 b6 1-0

That which is static and repetitive is boring. That which is dynamic and random is confusing. In between lies art.

JOHN LOCKE

5 The Age of Universality

Our knowledge is the amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds.
RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Following New Dynamism, a new era dawned, lasting from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. I call this period *The Age of Universality*. During that time we saw the rise of a number of players that *synthesized* the lessons from all previous eras – players who were able to handle all kinds of positions, albeit still with each player having his own distinct style. They had absorbed the teachings of Morphy, Steinitz, Nimzowitsch, Bronstein and all the other giants that we have discussed so far. Some of these earlier legends had distinct strengths but also distinct weaknesses. The players of the Age of Universality too had multiple strengths but few weaknesses. While they may not have invented new paradigms like Steinitz or Nimzowitsch, they *synthesized* and *executed* the teachings of chess history and thereby elevated chess to a new level. These were players like Spassky, Fischer, Larsen and Karpov.

Some contemporary chess fans mainly remember Boris Spassky as losing in the legendary match with Fischer in Reykjavik 1972. That is a shame because Spassky was one of the greatest in chess history and in my opinion he was the world's first really universal chess-player. I remember a description of Spassky by former World Correspondence Champion Jørn Sloth – a countryman of mine – from a book that I read as a teenager, *Bogen om Skak* (The Book of Chess): "Spassky's first coach was Grandmaster Tolush, an attacking master *par excellence*. His influence is clearly visible in Spassky's early games. Later he gets Grandmaster Bondarevsky as his coach. Together with him he develops the more positional sides of his game. His style becomes universal. He can do anything – almost perfectly." An apt description.

Spassky's problem in relation to the 1972 match was that he peaked a few years before Fischer. Had the match between these two greats been played perhaps five years earlier, we might have seen a different winner. In fact, Fischer had never beaten Spassky before the match in Iceland, having on the other hand lost three out of five previous games.

Let's see two very different games from Spassky's second World Championship match against Petrosian – the one in 1969 that finally secured Spassky the World Championship (Petrosian won their first meeting in 1966 to stay World Champion).

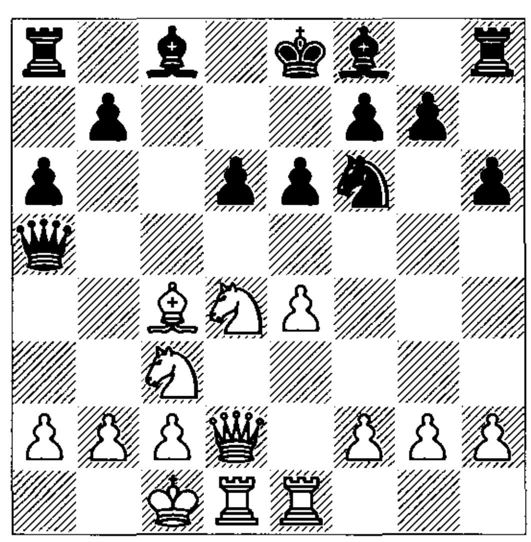
Spassky – Petrosian
World Ch match (game 19), Moscow 1969

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6

The sharp Najdorf Variation is probably not consistent with Petrosian's cautious style but at this point the World Champion was trailing by a point.

6 ♗g5 ♘bd7 7 ♗c4 ♕a5 8 ♕d2 h6 9 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 10 0-0-0 e6 11 ♖he1 *(D)*

B



This line is hardly seen any more these days. Black has secured the two bishops but at the cost of lagging seriously behind in development. White has centralized his whole army.

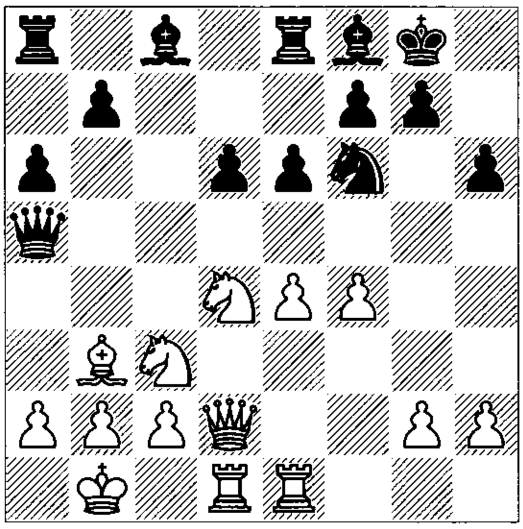
11...♗e7?!

This move is to a certain extent the decisive error. Petrosian prepares to castle kingside but

runs directly into a devastating attack. A better choice was 11...♗d7 followed by 12...0-0-0, as suggested by Petrosian's second Boleslavsky.

12 f4 0-0 13 ♗b3 ♖e8 14 ♔b1 ♗f8 *(D)*

W



15 g4!

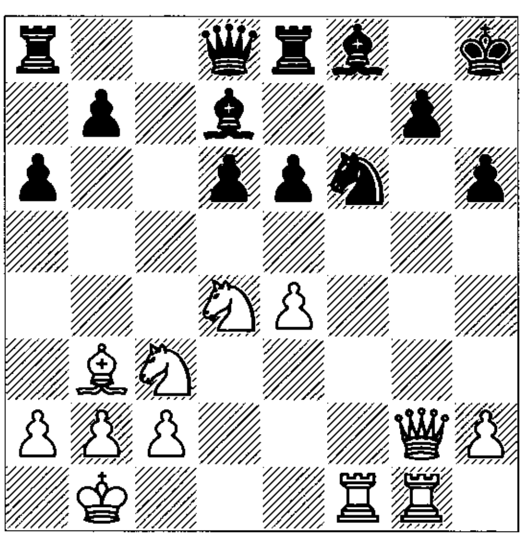
Spassky the attacker! A pawn is a small price to pay for the open g-file. Notice that Black cannot really decline the offer because of the h6-pawn 'sticking out'. It is well-known that you should try to avoid weakening your kingside with pawn moves, as they may become a target. This is a case in point; Black cannot allow White to play g5.

15...♘xg4 16 ♕g2 ♘f6 17 ♖g1 ♗d7 18 f5 ♔h8 19 ♖df1!

Spassky follows Tal's advice of increasing the Attacking Ratio. More pieces to the kingside!

19...♕d8 20 fxe6 fxe6 *(D)*

W



21 e5!

Spassky includes the c3-knight into the attack with devastating consequences.

21...dxe5 22 ♘e4! ♘h5

22...♘xe4 23 ♖xf8+! and 22...exd4 23 ♘xf6 followed by 24 ♕g6 both lead to mate.

23 ♕g6! exd4

After 23...♘f4 Geller gives the cute line 24 ♖xf4! exf4 25 ♘f3! (the quiet move, threatening 26 ♘e5) 25...♕a5 26 ♘f6! ♕f5 27 ♕xh6+! and Black is mated.

24 ♘g5! 1-0

Here too mate follows after 24...hxg5 25 ♕xh5+ ♔g8 26 ♕f7+ ♔h7 27 ♖f3! e5 28 ♕h5#. Notice that even the bishop on b3 is included in the mating attack!

Petrosian won the 20th game to get within one point, but in the 21st game of the match Spassky *de facto* secured the World Championship. This time it was a positional rout.

Spassky – Petrosian

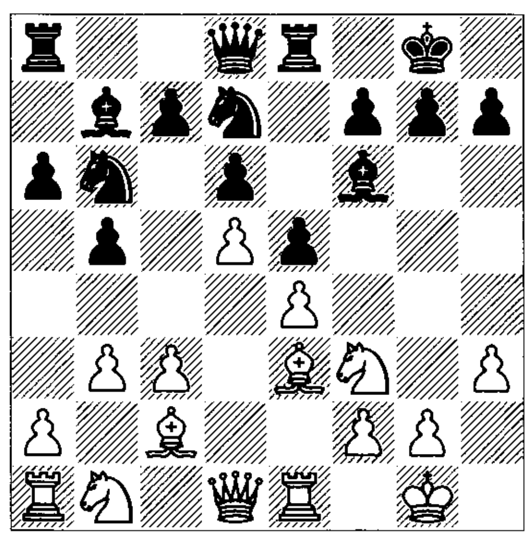
World Ch match (game 21), Moscow 1969

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 0-0 8 c3 d6 9 h3 ♘d7

An old line, popularized in the 1940s and 1950s by Keres and Smyslov, amongst others. It is still occasionally seen.

10 d4 ♗f6 11 ♗e3 ♘a5 12 ♗c2 ♘c4 13 ♗c1 ♗b7 14 b3 ♘cb6 15 ♗e3 ♖e8 16 d5 *(D)*

B



The contours of the position are starting to show. White aims at building a space advantage whereas Black may attack the centre by ...c6 and/or ...f5.

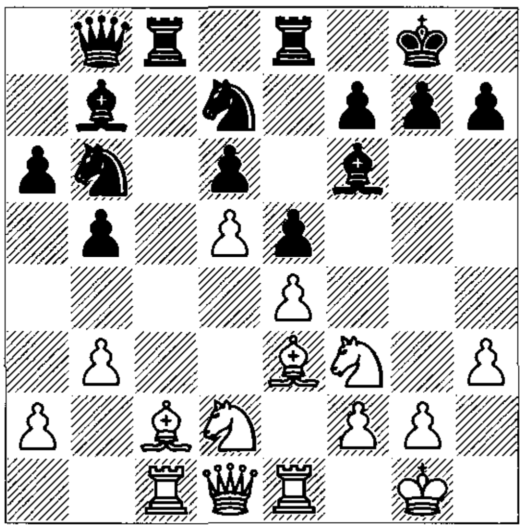
16...♖c8?!

Here and in the following few moves, Petrosian plays too passively. Black has to act fast before White builds a grip on the position, exploiting his space advantage. In a more recent high-level rapid game, the right way for Black was shown: 16...♗e7 17 ♘bd2 c6! 18 c4 cxd5 19 cxd5 f5! 20 exf5 ♘xd5 21 ♘f1 ♖c8 22 ♗d2

♘7f6 23 ♘g5 ♕d7 24 ♖c1 b4 25 ♘e6 ♘c3 26 ♗xc3 ♖xc3 27 ♗b1 ♖ec8 28 ♖xc3 bxc3 29 ♗c2 ♕c6 30 ♘e3 d5, and Black was better and eventually won in Anand-Svidler, Rapidplay, Haifa 2000.

17 ♘bd2 c6 18 c4 cxd5 19 cxd5 ♕c7 20 ♖c1 ♕b8 *(D)*

W



21 a4!

Having obtained a stable space advantage, Spassky initiates a common plan in the Ruy Lopez: undermining Black's b-pawn. Notice how accurately Spassky carries out this strategic plan over the next few moves, and eventually annihilates the pawn.

21...♘c5

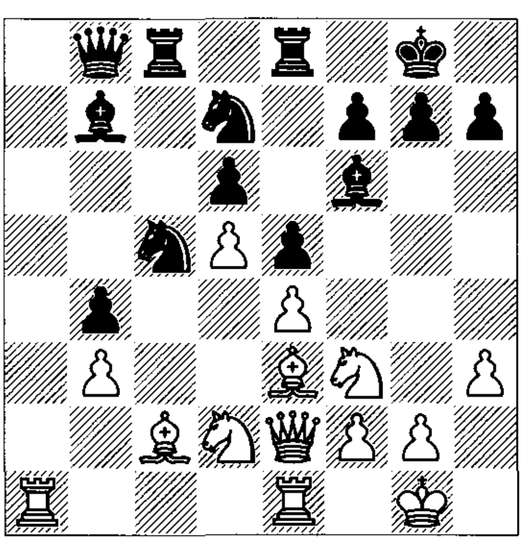
After 21...bxa4 White can simply retake with 22 bxa4 and start playing on the b-file, or he may try 22 b4!? followed by 23 ♖a1 and 24 ♗xa4, taking the c5-square from Black's knights.

22 axb5 axb5 23 ♖a1 b4!?

A tough call. Black gives up the c4-square to avoid being suffocated by an eventual b4 advance by White.

24 ♕e2 ♘bd7 *(D)*

W



25 ♗d3!

A powerful positional move. Spassky rightly judges that the two bishops are not worth much in this closed position and prepares 26 ♗b5. Black must take.

25...♘xd3 26 ♕xd3 ♗a8 27 ♘c4

A wonderful square for the knight.

27...♘c5 28 ♗xc5!

Again White does not mind parting with his bishop. The knights are superior to the bishops here.

28...♖xc5 29 ♖a4! h6 30 ♕d2! ♗e7

Black could not save the b-pawn as 30...♖b5 is met by a small tactical blow: 31 ♖xa8! ♕xa8 32 ♘xd6.

31 ♖ea1 ♗b7 32 ♕xb4

The master of positional play, Petrosian, has been positionally outplayed. Black is lost.

32...f5?!

This bid for activity comes much too late. Here it just loses further material.

33 ♖a7! ♖c7 34 exf5 ♕c8

34...♗xd5 is not possible because of 35 ♕xb8 ♖xb8 36 ♖xc7. Two pawns down, Black may as well have resigned but understandably Petrosian needed some time to accept the loss of the World Championship.

35 ♘e3 e4 36 ♘d4 ♗f6 37 ♖f1 ♗a6 38 ♖xc7 ♕xc7 39 ♕a4 ♖a8 40 ♖d1 ♕b8 41 ♘c6 ♕b7 42 ♕xe4 ♕xb3 43 ♖e1 ♗c3 44 ♖b1 ♕a2 45 ♘b4 ♕a4 46 ♕e6+ ♔h8 47 ♕xd6 ♗e2 48 ♘c6 ♕a2 49 ♖b8+ ♖xb8 50 ♕xb8+ ♔h7 51 ♕g3 ♗h5 52 ♔h2 ♗e1 53 f6! 1-0

53...gxf6 54 ♘f5 ♗g6 55 ♕c7+ mates. This victory left Spassky two points up with three games left.

Spassky did not hold the title long. While he seemed saturated after winning the title, the chess world observed the rapid ascent of another young prodigy: Bobby Fischer. I occasionally give lectures for business executives entitled 'Chess and Strategy', and in these lectures I call Fischer *'Master of Execution'*. Fischer's games are very clear; when playing over his games you can always follow the logical evolution of his strategic ideas. There are no 'do-nothing moves'; all moves seem to be part of a coherent strategic plan. Like Spassky, Fischer was capable of playing all kinds of positions. In his commemoration article about Fischer in *New In Chess*, Timman tracks the beginning of

Fischer's ascent to the throne back to the second leg of the Piatigorsky Cup in Santa Monica 1966. Here Fischer had an amazing run, beating players like Larsen, Najdorf, Reshevsky, Ivkov and Portisch. However, he still failed to catch Spassky, who won this super-tournament half a point ahead of the American. Let's see Fischer's win against Lajos Portisch.

Portisch – Fischer
Santa Monica 1966

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4

The Nimzo-Indian – a relatively rare opening in Fischer's games, as he usually preferred to have his bishop on g7 as in the King's Indian, the Grünfeld or the Modern Benoni.

4 e3 b6

"Other moves have been analysed to death" – Fischer in *My 60 Memorable Games*.

5 ♘e2 ♗a6 6 ♘g3

According to Fischer, this is "inconsistent", and it is true that 6 a3 is more common here.

6...♗xc3+ 7 bxc3 d5 8 ♕f3!?

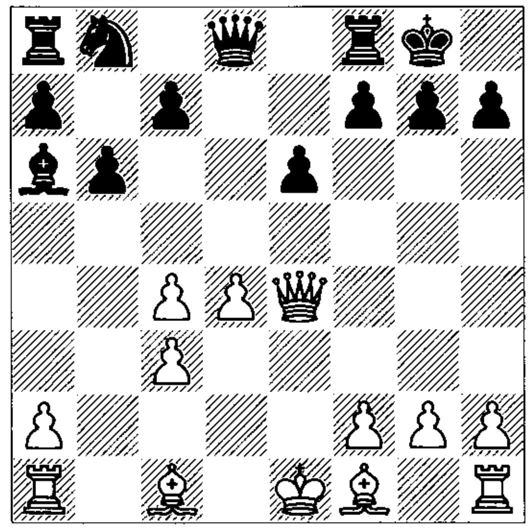
Fischer is critical towards this move and prefers 8 cxd5 with equal play. Perhaps Portisch was tempted to try the text-move because a few years earlier he had faced it as Black and had to struggle to draw after 8...♕d7 9 cxd5 exd5 10 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 11 ♕e2 ♘b8 12 0-0 0-0 13 c4 ♘e4 14 cxd5 ♘xg3 15 hxg3 ♕xd5 16 ♗a3 ♖e8 17 ♖ac1 c6 18 ♖c2 ♘d7 19 ♖fc1 ♖ac8 20 ♕f3 ♕a5 21 ♗d6 c5 22 ♕f5 ♘f6 23 ♗e5 ♖c6 24 dxc5 bxc5 25 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 26 ♕xc5 ♕xc5 27 ♖xc5 (Bronstein-Portisch, Budapest 1961 – Black did manage to draw).

8...0-0 9 e4 dxe4!

Or perhaps Portisch was hoping for 9...dxc4, as Fischer played against Saidy at the US Championship in New York 1965/6. After 10 ♗g5! h6 11 h4! (rather than Saidy's 11 ♗d2) White has a strong attack according to Fischer.

10 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 11 ♕xe4 *(D)*

B



11...♕d7!

Fischer awards this move two exclamation marks and Evans, in the preface to the game in *My 60 Memorable Games*, calls it "a positional trap". Fischer was brilliant in determining such positional nuances. White is invited to capture two rooks for the queen, but as Fischer has correctly judged, the queen is superior to the rooks here. Rooks need open files to display their strength, and the c4-pawn is going to fall.

12 ♗a3 ♖e8 13 ♗d3

13 0-0-0 comes into consideration (Fischer).

13...f5 14 ♕xa8?!

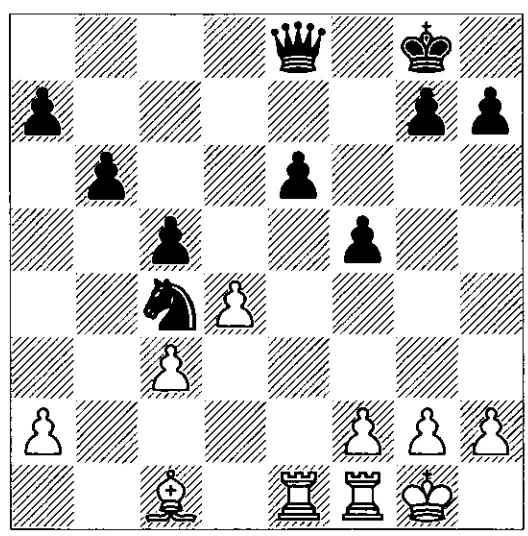
Portisch cannot resist the temptation, but the quiet 14 ♕e2 was better.

14...♘c6 15 ♕xe8+ ♕xe8 16 0-0 ♘a5 17 ♖ae1 ♗xc4

This is not bad but Fischer, with his customary self-critical approach, labels it "too routine". 17...♕a4! was even stronger.

18 ♗xc4 ♘xc4 19 ♗c1 c5 *(D)*

W



Let us take stock. Material-wise White is doing all right but his rooks are not active and the knight on c4 dominates the bishop. Black is clearly better and as usual Fischer's technique is impeccable.

20 dxc5

20 d5 is simply met by 20...e5, when the d-pawn can safely be blockaded by the knight.

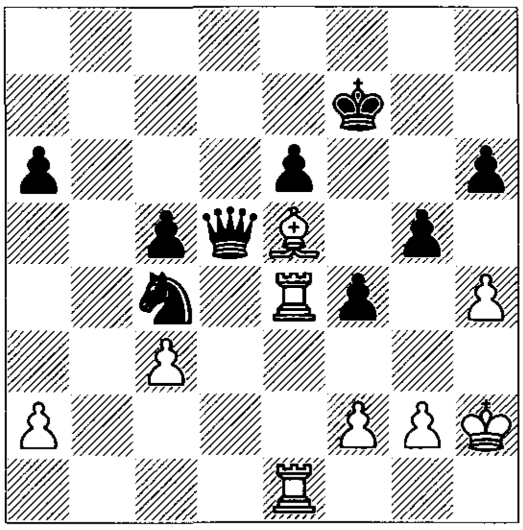
20...bxc5 21 ♗f4 h6 22 ♖e2 g5!

Gaining space on the kingside and harassing the bishop even further.

23 ♗e5 ♕d8 24 ♖fe1 ♔f7 25 h3 f4! 26 ♔h2 a6 27 ♖e4 ♕d5 28 h4 *(D)*

28 ♖4e2 was better but insufficient in the long run after 28...f3 29 gxf3 ♘d2!.

B



28...♘e3!

Winning material, as now 29 f3 loses to 29...♕d2 30 ♖g1 ♕f2 (Fischer).

29 ♖1xe3 fxe3 30 ♖xe3 ♕xa2 31 ♖f3+ ♔e8 32 ♗g7 ♕c4 33 hxg5 hxg5 34 ♖f8+ ♔d7 35 ♖a8 ♔c6 0-1

Fischer – Spassky

World Ch match (game 6), Reykjavik 1972

1 c4!?

A remarkable move. Fischer had been a 1 e4 player all his career, but in Reykjavik he played the text-move four times, achieving two wins and two draws.

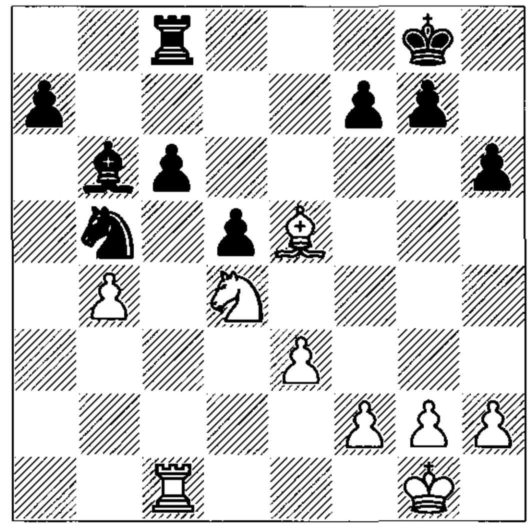
1...e6

In game 8 Spassky chose 1...c5 but lost that game horribly too.

2 ♘f3 d5 3 d4 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 ♗e7 5 ♗g5

Game 14 was a comedy of errors. After 5 ♗f4 0-0 6 e3 c5 7 dxc5 ♘c6 8 cxd5 exd5 9 ♗e2 ♗xc5 10 0-0 ♗e6 11 ♖c1 ♖c8 12 a3 h6 13 ♗g3 ♗b6 14 ♘e5 ♘e7 15 ♘a4 ♘e4 16 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 17 ♘f3 ♗d7 18 ♗e5 ♗xa4! 19 ♕xa4 ♘c6, Fischer squandered a pawn by 20 ♗f4?! ♕f6! 21 ♗b5?! ♕xb2 22 ♗xc6 ♘c3! (oops!) 23 ♕b4 ♕xb4 24 axb4 bxc6, which Spassky then blundered away again after 25 ♗e5 ♘b5 26 ♖c1 ♖c8 27 ♘d4 *(D)*:

B



27...f6? 28 ♗xf6! ♗xd4 (28...gxf6 29 ♘xb5, and the c-pawn is pinned) 29 ♗xd4 ♘xd4 30 exd4 ♖b8 31 ♔f1 ♖xb4 32 ♖xc6 ♖xd4 33 ♖a6, and a draw was soon agreed.

5...0-0 6 e3 h6 7 ♗h4 b6

The Tartakower Variation – or, as the Russian-speaking part of the world labels it, the Bondarevsky-Makogonov Variation. This line was an old favourite of Spassky's, which he had played many times with excellent results. However, following this loss, Spassky reverted to the solid 7...♘bd7 in game 12 and drew without too much trouble.

8 cxd5

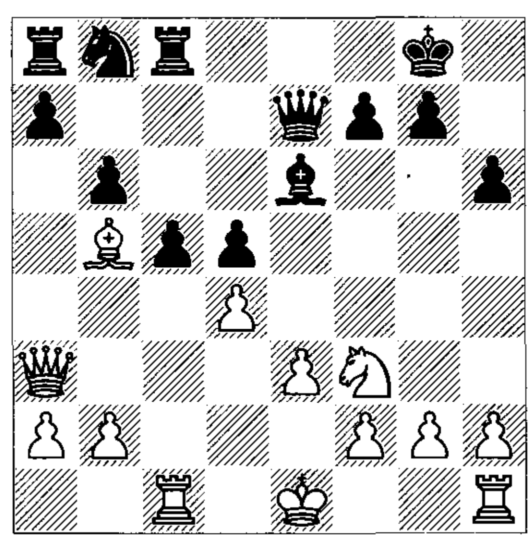
This line is rarely played nowadays, as several paths to equality for Black have been shown. It is not because of the opening that Fischer wins this game; it is in his superior handling of the subsequent middlegame.

8...♘xd5 9 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 10 ♘xd5 exd5 11 ♖c1 ♗e6!

This is more active than 11...♗b7 from Petrosian-Spassky, Santa Monica 1966.

12 ♕a4 c5 13 ♕a3 ♖c8 14 ♗b5!? *(D)*

B



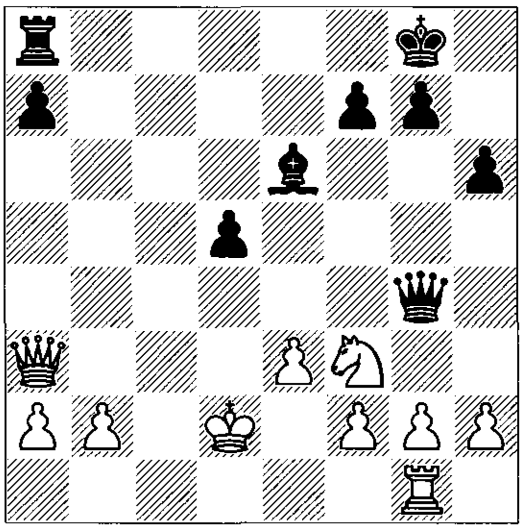
An interesting and subtle idea invented by Furman, curiously later Karpov's long-time coach. White hopes to induce weaknesses in Black's position. Fischer was always well aware of the developments in Soviet chess, sometimes even more so than the Soviets themselves!

14...a6

Not bad, but it was later established that 14...♕b7! is Black's best here. That led to a

brilliant win in the game Timman-Geller, played shortly after the Reykjavik match (Hilversum 1973): 15 dxc5 bxc5 16 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 17 ♕xc5 ♘a6! 18 ♗xa6 (18 ♕c6 ♕xc6 19 ♗xc6 ♖b8! is fine for Black) 18...♕xa6 19 ♕a3 ♕c4! 20 ♔d2?! (20 ♕c3 was later tried but only leads to equality after 20...♕xa2 21 0-0 ♖b8) 20...♕g4! 21 ♖g1 *(D)*.

B



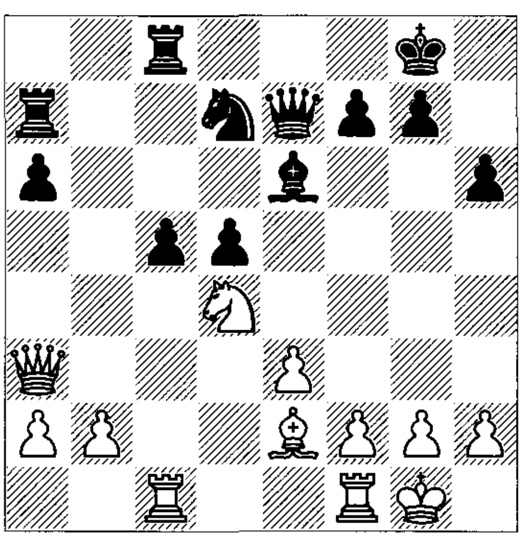
21...d4! (opening lines towards the white king, which is stuck in the centre) 22 ♘xd4 ♕h4! 23 ♖e1 ♕xf2+ 24 ♖e2 ♕f1 25 ♘xe6 fxe6 26 ♕d6 ♔h8 27 e4 ♖c8 28 ♔e3 ♖f8 29 ♖d2 e5 30 ♕xe5? ♕e1+ 31 ♖e2 ♕g1+ 32 ♔d3 ♖d8+ 33 ♔c3 ♕d1 34 ♕b5 ♕d4+ 35 ♔c2 a6! 36 ♕xa6 ♕c5+ 0-1.

15 dxc5 bxc5 16 0-0 ♖a7 17 ♗e2 ♘d7!?

Only this is a novelty. 17...a5 18 ♖c3 ♘d7 19 ♖fc1 ♖e8 20 ♗b5 ♗g4 21 ♘d2 led to a nagging white plus against the hanging pawns in Furman-Geller, Moscow 1970.

18 ♘d4! *(D)*

B

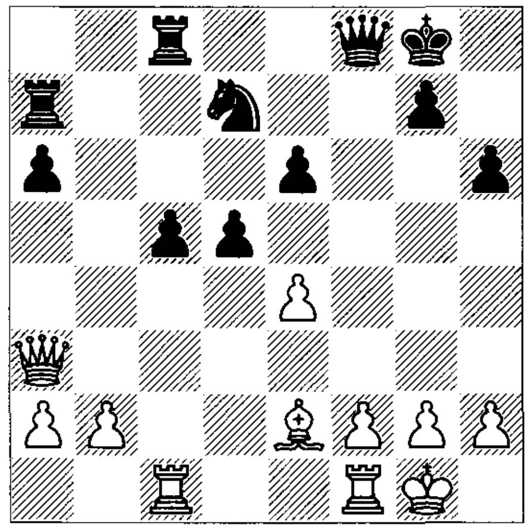


18...♕f8?!

This allows Fischer to shift gears from positional pressure on the hanging pawns to active play in the centre. This ability always to be ready to change the nature of the position was a key strength in Fischer's play. I should mention that after 18...♘f6 Black has little to fear; e.g., 19 ♘b3 ♖ac7! 20 ♖fd1 d4! 21 ♘a5 ♗d5 22 ♗c4 ♕e6 with equality (Kasparov).

19 ♘xe6! fxe6 20 e4! *(D)*

B



20...d4?

The sudden shift of events causes Spassky to flounder. Usually he was very good at sensing the critical moments of a game, but at the match in Reykjavik he was clearly not in his best form. The text-move hands White a clear strategic advantage, as he can now block Black's pawns on the light squares and then proceed to build up an attack on the kingside. After 20...♘f6 21 e5 (or 21 exd5 exd5 22 ♗f3 c4 with equality) 21...♘d7 22 f4 c4 23 ♕h3 ♖c6 24 b3 ♘b6 or 20...c4 21 ♕h3 ♖c6! 22 ♗g4 ♕f7, Black still has a defensible position, according to Kasparov.

21 f4 ♕e7 22 e5!

Fischer was always very fond of his light-squared bishop, and here too it is much stronger than the knight, which is deprived of good squares in the centre.

22...♖b8?!

The World Champion misses his last chance to put up a fight. Black had to try 22...♘b6, when White still needs to be accurate to convert his advantage. This position has been extensively analysed over the years, and it was not until Kasparov – backed by powerful computers – published his analysis in *My Great Predecessors, Volume 4*, that the issue was solved: White wins by 23 ♕d3! (threatening to launch a lethal attack with ♕e4 and ♗d3) 23...♘d5 (23...♖d8 24 ♕e4 ♕b7 leads to a lost ending after 25 ♕xb7 ♖xb7 26 ♖xc5 ♘d5 27 b3) 24 ♕e4 ♕f7 25 f5! ♘e3 26 fxe6 ♕xe6 27 ♗d3!

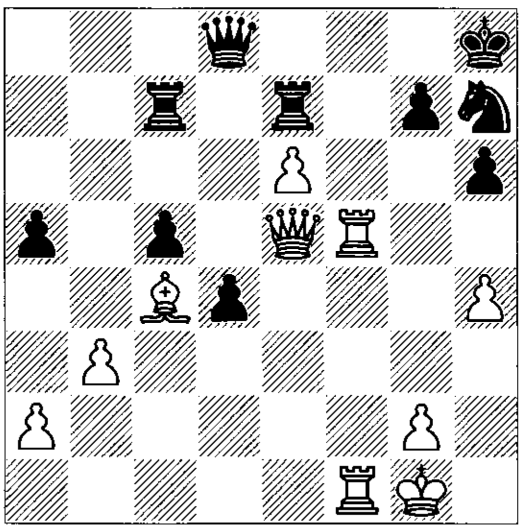
♖f7 28 ♕h7+ ♔f8 29 ♖xf7+ ♕xf7 (29...♔xf7 30 ♗c4!) 30 ♗c4!! ♘xc4 31 ♖f1 ♕xf1+ 32 ♔xf1 ♖e8 33 ♕g6! ♖xe5 34 ♕xa6 ♘e3+ 35 ♔f2, and White should eventually win.

23 ♗c4 ♔h8 24 ♕h3! ♘f8 25 b3 a5 26 f5!

Having placed all his pieces in attacking positions, Fischer moves in for the kill. The uncoordinated black pieces are unable to organize a defence.

26...exf5 27 ♖xf5 ♘h7 28 ♖cf1 ♕d8 29 ♕g3 ♖e7 30 h4 ♖bb7 31 e6! ♖bc7 32 ♕e5 *(D)*

B



A brief comparison of the pieces leaves no doubt of the result – Black's position is hopeless.

32...♕e8 33 a4 ♕d8 34 ♖1f2 ♕e8 35 ♖2f3 ♕d8 36 ♗d3! ♕e8 37 ♕e4! ♘f6

Black is mated after 37...♖xe6 38 ♖f8+!.

38 ♖xf6!

Breaking the last defences and kicking in the door to Black's king.

38...gxf6 39 ♖xf6 ♔g8 40 ♗c4 ♔h8 41 ♕f4 1-0

A great game by the American, who took the lead for the first time in the match (3½-2½) and never looked back.

Another player with a universal style is my legendary countryman Bent Larsen. Larsen's influence on chess in the West in those years is hard to overestimate. Whereas Fischer turned out to be the one that was able to take the crown from the Soviets in matches, Larsen was 'Tournament World Champion' of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In those years he played and won many more tournaments than the American. Whereas Fischer was an 'objective' player, Larsen was willing to take risks in order to pursue a win in every game. This style was perfectly suited for tournaments but less so for matches. I shall show two Larsen games against Petrosian from the Piatigorsky Cup in Santa Monica 1966. The Danish grandmaster defeated the then World Champion 2-0 – and he did so in two different ways, showing his ability to play all kinds of positions. The first one was a tactical gem.

Larsen – Petrosian
Santa Monica 1966

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 g6 5 ♗e3 ♗g7 6 c4 ♘f6 7 ♘c3

The Maroczy Bind is reputed to be a somewhat passive and difficult variation for Black, but Larsen himself has played it in a number of instructive games. Often White ends up with a useless light-squared bishop, restrained by its own pawns.

7...♘g4!?

Larsen's favourite move too, although he has also played the main line 7...d6 8 ♗e2 0-0 9 0-0 ♗d7 10 ♕d2 ♘xd4 11 ♗xd4 ♗c6 as Black.

8 ♕xg4 ♘xd4 9 ♕d1 ♘e6 10 ♕d2!?

Not a trivial choice. 10 ♖c1 is the alternative, but the text-move involves a small amount of psychology, another Larsen speciality.

10...d6

While this move is safe and good – and probably what Larsen expected Petrosian to play – 10...♕a5!? is more enterprising and probably better. However, it is not really Petrosian's style, and Larsen knew it. After 11 ♖c1 Black has a choice – either the risky pawn grab 11...♗xc3!? 12 ♖xc3 (12 ♕xc3 ♕xc3+ 13 ♖xc3 does not bring White much) 12...♕xa2 or the more solid 11...b6 12 ♗e2 ♗b7 13 f3 h5!? 14 0-0 g5!?; e.g., 15 ♖fd1 d6 16 ♘d5 ♕xd2 17 ♖xd2 ♗e5 18 b4 ♖c8 19 a4 h4 20 ♗f1 f6 21 ♖a2 ♗d4 22 ♔f2 ♔f7 23 a5 ♗xd5 24 exd5 ♗xe3+ 25 ♔xe3 ♘f4 26 ♔d2 ♖c7 27 axb6 axb6 28 ♖a6 ♖hc8! 29 ♖xb6 ♘xd5 30 ♖b5 ♘f4 with equality and an eventual draw in Karpov-Larsen, Brussels 1987.

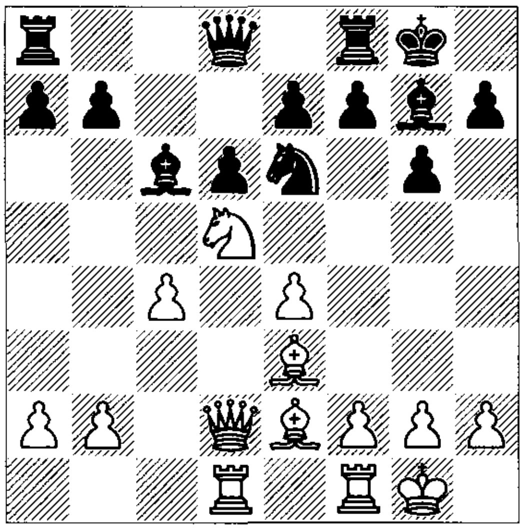
11 ♗e2 ♗d7 12 0-0 0-0 13 ♖ad1!

Now we see why Larsen preferred 10 ♕d2 to 10 ♖c1 – the rook is more actively placed on d1.

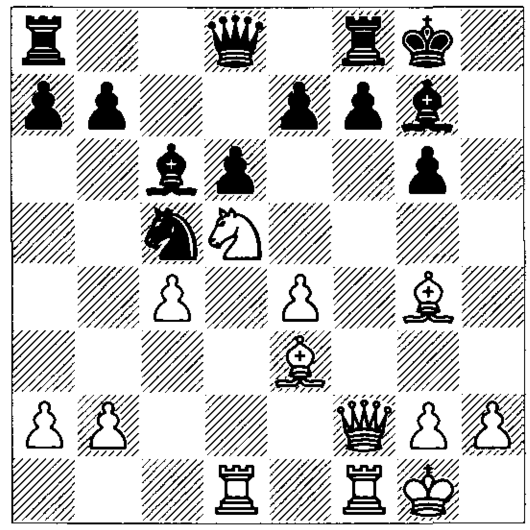
13...♗c6 14 ♘d5 *(D)*

14...♖e8?!

B



W



Petrosian plays this phase of the game too passively. This was not one of his main opening lines, and one gets the impression that around here he must have regretted his choice of opening. Correct was 14...♘c5 15 f3 (15 ♕c2 a5 16 ♗xc5 dxc5 17 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 18 ♖xd8 ♖fxd8 is not dangerous for Black – Larsen) 15...a5 with a solid and typical 'Maroczy Bind' position.

15 f4!

Seeing Black's passive set-up, White initiates an attack.

15...♘c7?

While so far Black has merely played passively but not badly, this is a clear mistake. He had to seek some activity with 15...♘c5, after which 16 e5 ♘d7 17 ♘b4 ♗e4!? (or 17...♕c7 – Larsen) 18 exd6 exd6 (Kasparov) is not too bad for him.

16 f5!

Now, on the other hand, Black is in serious difficulties.

16...♘a6 17 ♗g4?

White continues to play for the attack, but as pointed out by Larsen, 17 b4! was much stronger, playing on both sides of the board. In that case Black would be in dire straits, whereas now he is still in the game.

17...♘c5 18 fxg6 hxg6 19 ♕f2 ♖f8 *(D)*

20 e5!

A brilliant pawn sacrifice aimed at gaining time for the attack. The point is that the direct 20 ♕h4 is met by 20...♗xd5 21 exd5 (21 ♖xd5?! e6!) 21...e5!. In his great book *50 Selected Games 1948-1969*, Larsen explains his line of thought leading to the text-move. Essentially, it was a process of *elimination*: "I have several times shown this position as an example of how sometimes you may find the right move through elimination. Bad is, e.g., 20 ♗xc5 dxc5 21 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 22 ♖xd8 ♖axd8, when Black has sufficient compensation for the queen. To a draw leads 20 ♗xc5 dxc5 21 ♕xc5 ♗xd5 22 ♖xd5 ♕b6 23 b4 ♕xc5+ 24 bxc5 – but I do not want a draw! *[Larsen in a nutshell! – LBH]* The e4-pawn is hanging, and quiet play will leave White with the worse pawn-structure. 20 ♕h4 is answered by 20...♗xd5, after which 21 ♖xd5 is bad because of 21...e6. However, this variation inspires an idea, and since other moves are unsatisfactory, White plays 20 e5!." An interesting peep into the thinking of a top grandmaster!

20...♗xe5 21 ♕h4 ♗xd5 22 ♖xd5 ♘e6

Larsen awards this a question mark and recommends 22...e6, although the endgame after 23 ♕xd8 ♖fxd8 24 ♖xe5 dxe5 25 ♗xc5 f5 26 ♗d1 ♖d2 27 ♗b3! is good for White. The two bishops are very powerful. However, as pointed out by Kasparov, Black's decisive mistake is not the text-move but rather his next one.

23 ♖f3 ♗f6?

This loses. Apparently the World Champion had simply missed White's brilliant queen sacrifice on the 25th move. 23...f5! 24 ♖h3 ♘g7! is correct, when White can choose between forcing a draw (although it is not likely that Larsen would have done that) with 25 ♕h7+ ♔f7 26 ♖h6 fxg4 27 ♕xg6+ ♔g8, when White must give perpetual check as 28 ♖h7? fails to 28...♕e8 29 ♕h6 ♘f5, or the unclear 25 ♗f3!? ♔f7 26 ♖b5! ♖h8 27 ♗d5+ ♘e6 28 ♕g5 ♕d7! (Kasparov) and the game remains open.

24 ♕h6 ♗g7 *(D)*

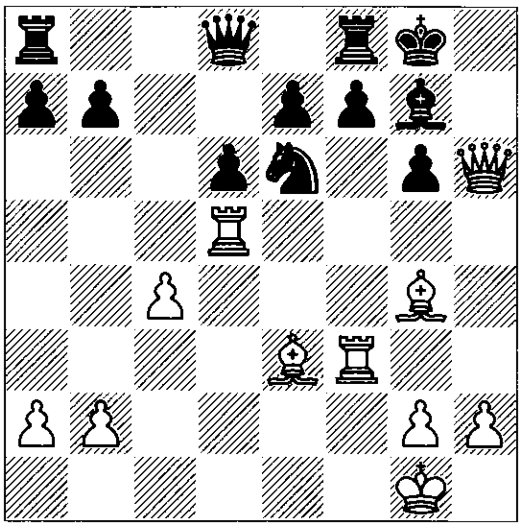
25 ♕xg6! ♘f4

25...fxg6 26 ♗xe6+ is similar to the game.

26 ♖xf4 fxg6 27 ♗e6+ ♖f7

Forced, as after 27...♔h7 28 ♖h4+ ♗h6 29 ♗xh6! ♖f5 (29...g5 30 ♖xg5 ♕b6+ 31 c5!) 30

W



♖xf5 gxf5 31 ♗f7! e5 32 ♖h3!, Black is mated following 33 ♗f8+.

28 ♖xf7 ♔h8 29 ♖g5!

A brilliant concluding *quiet move*. Black is helpless. Notice that again the superior Attacking Ratio decides the game – two rooks and two bishops versus one defending bishop. You do the math.

29...b5 30 ♖g3! 1-0

A crushing win. And yet Larsen himself prefers the second game against Petrosian from the same tournament!

Petrosian – Larsen

Santa Monica 1966

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 g6 3 g3 ♗g7 4 ♗g2 0-0 5 d4 d6 6 e3

This quiet system does not pose Black any serious problems.

6...c6 7 ♘ge2 a5 8 b3 ♘a6 9 0-0 e5 10 ♗b2 ♖e8 11 a3

Petrosian later lamented this move as it weakens b3, but it is not easy for White to find a good plan. The whole set-up seems too unambitious.

11...♖b8

Not only preventing b4 by taking the rook off the a-file – Larsen also toys with a queenside expansion by ...b5.

12 h3 h5

Larsen is famous for always pushing his rook's pawns!

13 ♕c2 ♗e6 14 ♔h2 ♕c7 15 ♖ac1 b5!

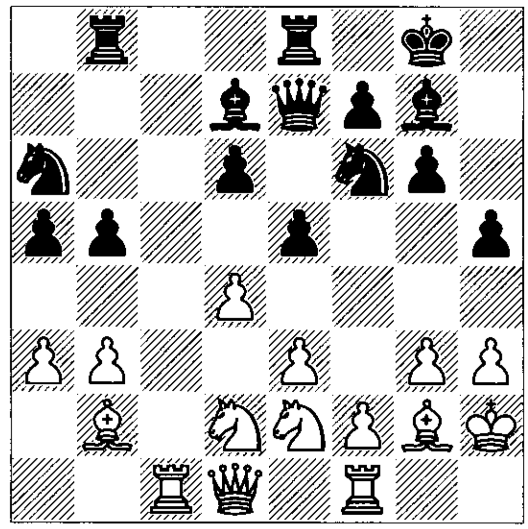
So far not much has happened, but now Black captures the initiative on the queenside.

16 cxb5 cxb5 17 ♕d1?!

As in the previous game, Petrosian plays the early middlegame too passively. White should liquidate into an ending by 17 ♘e4 ♕xc2 18 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 19 ♖xc2 ♖b6 (19...♗xb3 20 ♖c6), although Black has a small edge (Larsen).

17...♕e7 18 ♘b1 ♗d7 19 ♘d2 *(D)*

B



19...e4!

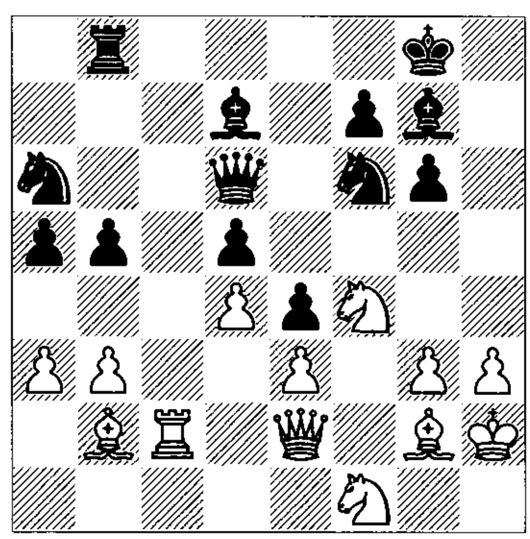
Black consistently grabs more space.

20 ♘f4 d5 21 ♕e2 ♕d6 22 ♖c2 ♖ec8 23 ♖fc1 ♖xc2 24 ♖xc2 h4!

A small positional advantage is added to the collection. Apart from extra space (and as a consequence superior mobility), Black now gains the better pawn-structure. Whereas in the previous game Petrosian was tactically overwhelmed, in this game he is positionally outplayed in the slow and systematic manner that was his own trademark.

25 ♘f1 hxg3+ 26 fxg3 *(D)*

B



26...b4!

Larsen grabs even more space. However, in addition to this, with the inclusion of ...b4 and a4 – White cannot afford to open the queenside – Black achieves a further strategic objective: since White cannot allow Black to manoeuvre his light-squared bishop to a dominant position on the a6-f1 diagonal, he has to accept the exchange of the light-squared bishops, leaving

him with the bad one on b2. And he even has to weaken his position in the process.

27 a4 ♖c8 28 ♖xc8+ ♗xc8 29 h4

There we have it. In order to exchange the light-squared bishops, White must place another pawn on a dark square, thus making the remaining bishop on b2 even worse.

29...♘c7 30 ♗h3 ♗xh3

Black may also consider keeping the bishop by 30...♗a6, but Larsen chose the exchange for two strategic reasons. First, when the opponent's remaining bishop is bad, it makes sense to exchange this one, and second, after 30...♗a6 White may initiate some counterplay on the kingside by playing g4. There is no need to complicate matters; the advantage is of a permanent nature and will not run away.

31 ♘xh3 ♗f8!

A strong regrouping.

32 ♔g2 ♕c6 33 ♕d1 ♗d6 34 ♘f2 ♘e6 35 ♗c1 ♘g7!

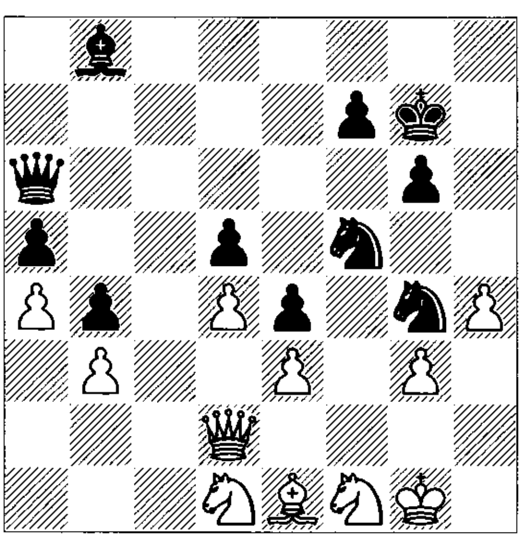
And another one. Larsen's patient manoeuvres deserve the highest praise. White is given no chance to break the chains.

36 ♗d2 ♘f5 37 ♔h3 ♕c8 38 ♔g2 ♔g7 39 ♘h1 ♘h6 40 ♗e1 ♕a6 41 ♘f2 ♘f5

The sealed move. These were the good old days! This gave Larsen ample time to look for the right way to exploit his undoubted positional advantage.

42 ♕d2 ♗b8 43 ♘d1 ♘g4 44 ♔g1 *(D)*

B



44...f6!

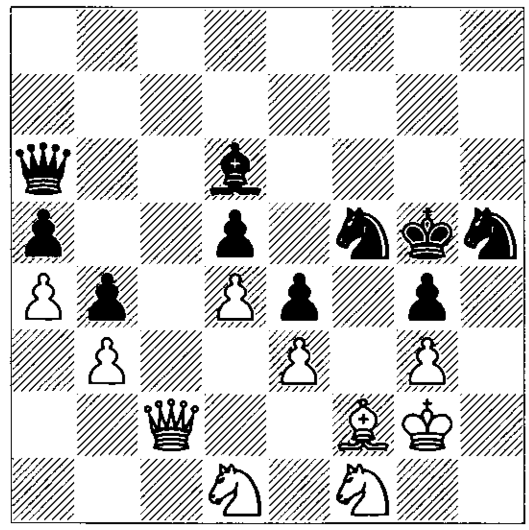
The fruit of Larsen's work on the adjourned position. Black grabs more space by ...f6 and ...g5.

45 ♔g2 g5! 46 ♘f2 ♘gh6

Of course Black does not swap knights. A good rule of thumb when you hold a space advantage is not to exchange pieces. That usually aids the defence.

47 hxg5 fxg5 48 ♘d1 ♔g6 49 ♘h2 g4! 50 ♕c2 ♗d6 51 ♘f1 ♘g8 52 ♘h2 ♘f6 53 ♘f1 ♔h5 54 ♘h2 ♔g5 55 ♘f1 ♘h5 56 ♗f2 ♘f6 57 ♗e1 ♘h5 58 ♗f2 *(D)*

B



58...♕a8!

Having passed the second time-control at move 56 – in those days the time-schedule was a leisurely 40 moves in 2½ hours followed by 16 moves per hour – Larsen initiates the decisive regrouping, against which White has no defence: the queen penetrates via h3.

59 ♗e1 ♕h8! 60 ♕c6 ♗xg3! 61 ♗xg3 ♘hxg3 0-1

Petrosian did not want to allow another queen sacrifice – 62 ♘xg3 ♕h3+ 63 ♔f2 ♕xg3+ 64 ♔e2 ♕xe3+! 65 ♘xe3 ♘xd4+ and wins. "A beautiful strangulation game against someone who was quite a python in his own right" (Euwe and Nunn).

That brings us to the final player of the Universality Era – the player who was to be the stepping stone before the birth of a new era: Anatoly Karpov. I belong to the group of people who – like Kasparov – believe that Karpov would have had good chances in a match with Fischer in 1975. It is a great pity that this match never took place. In my view Karpov embodied the teachings of all previous eras, and for about a decade – from the mid-1970s to the rise of Kasparov in the early to mid-1980s – he was the dominant figure in world chess. Kasparov, in *My Great Predecessors, Volume 5*, paid due tribute to his great rival: "His deep, infiltrating style, subtle positional feeling, and extraordinary persistence, practicality and flexibility

rapidly raised him to the very summit of chess ... Karpov's play was always distinguished by its exceptionally high degree of efficiency ... Karpov was not a researcher in the openings and he did not work so much on chess, but he was very skilful at selecting and absorbing new ideas, and then making brilliant use of them in practice ... An ability to grasp trends of chess development, which at one time also distinguished Lasker, helped Karpov to find his place in the changing conditions of the late 20th century." Karpov is perhaps the greatest tournament player ever – by his own count he has won more than 150 international tournaments in his career. Let us see some games that illustrate Karpov's versatile style of play.

Karpov – Spassky
Montreal 1979

1 d4!?

Not a trivial move at this point in Karpov's career. Until the loss of his world title to Kasparov in 1985, Karpov's main opening move was 1 e4. In the later stages of his career he switched to 1 d4, which may be more in line with his natural style. However, as I shall discuss in further detail in the last chapter of the book, the ability to open with both 1 e4 and 1 d4 – and successfully handle the very different positions that arise – is in my view essential in contemporary chess, and this is one of the edges Karpov may have held over Fischer, who was almost exclusively a 1 e4 player.

1...♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 ♗e7 5 ♗f4

This line was tested in a few games – with Karpov as Black – from the Karpov-Korchnoi World Championship match in Baguio City the year before. The World Champion experienced some problems and now apparently wanted to apply the lessons learned from White's perspective.

5...0-0 6 e3 c5 7 dxc5 ♘c6 8 ♕c2 ♕a5 9 a3 ♗xc5 10 ♖d1

The old main line, which has these days been superseded by the immediate 10 ♘d2 or the sharp 10 0-0-0!?. This last move was popularized by M.Gurevich, Shabalov and others in the late 1980s and quickly caught on. It is testimony to the richness of chess to see White castling queenside in the Queen's Gambit Declined!

10...♗e7 11 ♘d2 ♗d7?!

Spassky refrains from a theoretical discussion and simply develops his pieces. However, objectively speaking the main line 11...e5 – Karpov's choice in Baguio – is undoubtedly better. Now a position with an isolated d-pawn arises, and although Spassky has extensive experience in such positions – he was once an ardent practitioner of the Tarrasch Defence (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c5) – in the present game he falls prey to Karpov's subtle positional understanding of isolani positions, as did Kasparov when he trotted out the Tarrasch in the first few games of his first match with Karpov.

12 ♗e2 ♖fc8 13 0-0 ♕d8 14 cxd5 exd5 15 ♘f3 h6 16 ♘e5!

A standard plan in isolani positions. White initiates exchanges; with fewer pieces on the board, Black's potential dynamic compensation evaporates.

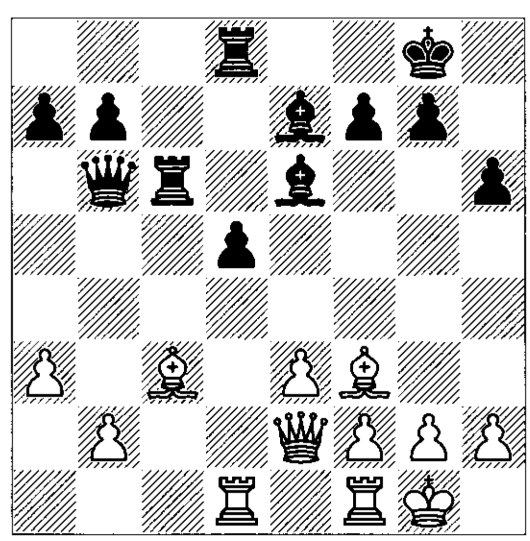
16...♗e6 17 ♘xc6 ♖xc6

Forced, as the desirable 17...bxc6 loses an exchange after 18 ♗a6.

18 ♗f3 ♕b6 19 ♗e5 ♘e4 20 ♕e2 ♘xc3 21 ♗xc3 ♖d8 *(D)*

21...♗xa3?! was not good because of the desperado 22 ♗xg7!, ripping open Black's kingside. However, an alternative – albeit somewhat desperate – suggested by Karpov is the positional exchange sacrifice 21...♖xc3!? 22 bxc3 ♕a5.

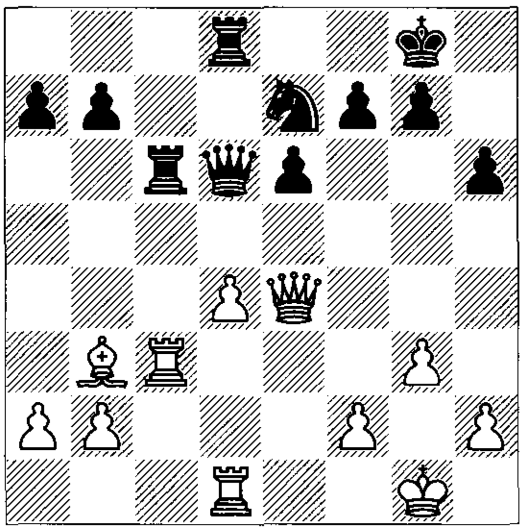
W



22 ♖d3!

White intends to employ 'Alekhine's Cannon' – both rooks and queen on the same file, with the queen behind the rooks. Karpov is an expert in manoeuvring his major pieces in the battle against an isolated pawn – just witness these two examples:

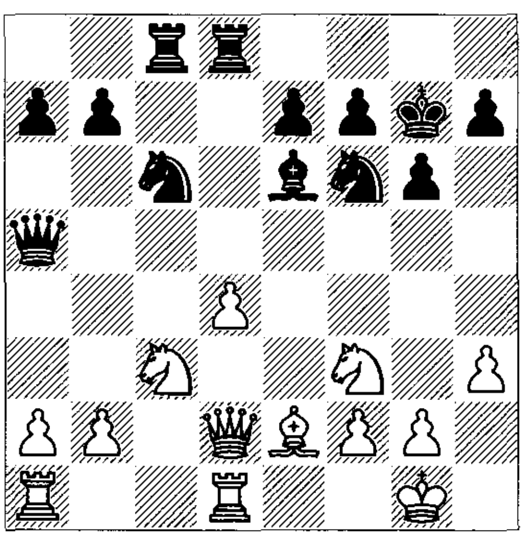
B



Korchnoi – Karpov
World Ch match (game 9), Merano 1981

21...♖b6! 22 ♕e1 ♕d7! 23 ♖cd3 ♖d6 24 ♕e4 ♕c6 25 ♕f4 ♘d5 26 ♕d2 ♕b6 27 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 28 ♖b3 ♕c6 29 ♕c3 ♕d7 30 f4?! b6 31 ♖b4 b5 32 a4 bxa4 33 ♕a3 a5 34 ♖xa4 ♕b5 35 ♖d2 e5! (transformation of advantages – Black goes after White's vulnerable king) 36 fxe5 ♖xe5 37 ♕a1 ♕e8! 38 dxe5 ♖xd2 39 ♖xa5 ♕c6 40 ♖a8+ ♔h7 41 ♕b1+ g6 42 ♕f1 ♕c5+ 43 ♔h1 ♕d5+ 0-1.

B



Bisguier – Karpov
Skopje Olympiad 1972

16...♖d6! 17 ♕e3 ♖cd8 18 a3 ♗b3 19 ♖d2 ♖e6 20 ♕f4 ♘d5 21 ♘xd5 ♖xd5 22 g4?! g5! 23 ♕g3 ♖f6 24 ♗d1 ♗c4 25 b3 ♗a6 26 b4 ♕d8 27 ♗b3 ♘xd4! 28 ♖xd4 (28 ♗xd5 ♘xf3+ 29 ♗xf3 ♕xd2) 28...♖xd4 29 ♘xg5 ♖d3 30 ♕h4 h6 31 ♘xf7 ♕d4 32 ♖e1 ♖xh3! 0-1.

We now return to Karpov-Spassky:

22...♖cd6 23 ♖fd1 ♖6d7 24 ♖1d2 ♕b5 25 ♕d1 b6 26 g3!

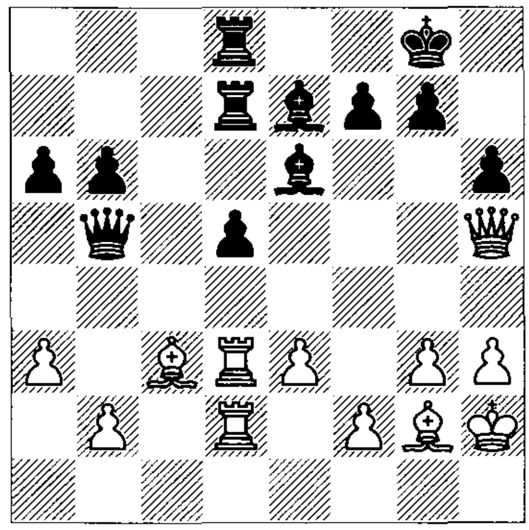
A neat position-improving move but at the same time the beginning of a shrewd plan that culminates on move 31.

26...♗f8 27 ♗g2 ♗e7 28 ♕h5!

Bringing the queen into attack position while incidentally threatening 29 e4 because of the unprotected black queen.

28...a6 29 h3 ♕c6 30 ♔h2 ♕b5 *(D)*

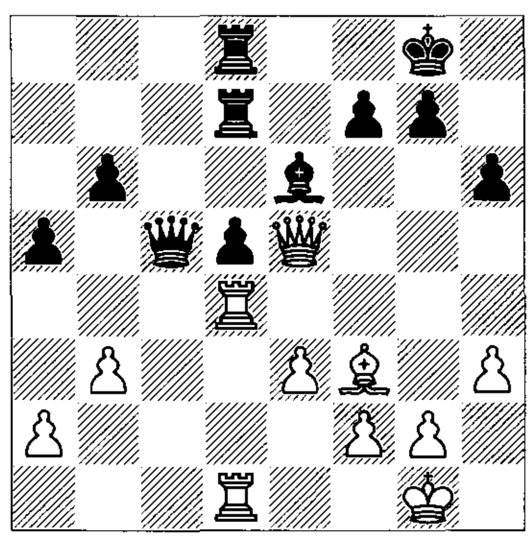
W



31 f4!

There it is! Having tied Black completely to the defence of the isolated pawn, White turns his attention to the kingside – abandoned as it is by the defence. This strategy is by now standard in play against an isolated pawn. Being a star pupil of the Botvinnik School, there is no doubt that Karpov knew the following game by his great teacher:

W



Botvinnik – Zagoriansky
Sverdlovsk 1943

As in the present game, Black is tied to the defence of the d-pawn, and Botvinnik now initiates a blitz attack on the kingside: 25 g4! ♕c6 26 g5! hxg5 27 ♕xg5 f6 (the threat was 28 ♕h5 and 29 ♖h4) 28 ♕g6 ♗f7 29 ♕g3 f5?!

(defending against 30 ♗g4 followed by 31 ♗f5 and 32 ♕h4, but weakening the kingside even further) 30 ♕g5 ♕e6 31 ♔h1! ♕e5 32 ♖g1 ♖f8 33 ♕h6! ♖b8 34 ♖h4 ♔f8 35 ♕h8+ ♗g8 36 ♖f4 ♖bb7 37 ♖g5 ♖f7 38 ♕h5 ♕a1+ 39 ♔g2 g6 40 ♕xg6 ♗h7 41 ♕d6+ ♖fe7 42 ♕d8+ 1-0.

Back to the main game...

31...f6 32 ♕d1 ♕c6 33 g4 g5?!

A tough call, and I am not sure that Spassky made the right decision. Rather than awaiting further kingside advances by White, Black slows him down but in the process weakens his own kingside, in particular the pawn on f6.

34 ♔h1!

A typical Karpov move. Before initiating action, he improves his position to the maximum – in this case by taking the king off the h2-b8 diagonal before making the f5 advance.

34...a5 35 f5 ♗f7 36 e4!

Finally everything is ready – White now wins the isolated d-pawn and with it the game.

36...♔g7 37 exd5 ♕c7 38 ♖e2! b5?

A blunder in a lost position. Better was, e.g., 38...♗d6, although this would scarcely offer any saving chances. One plan for White – pointed out by Karpov himself – is an exchange sacrifice on e6 at an appropriate moment, followed by an invasion on the light squares on the kingside when Black takes the rook and White recaptures with the f-pawn.

39 ♖xe7! ♖xe7 40 d6 ♕c4 41 b3! 1-0

Spassky – Karpov
Montreal 1979

This is the return game between the same two players as above from this double-round tournament that was won jointly by Karpov and Tal, ahead of Portisch, Ljubojevic, Timman, Spassky, etc. It illustrates Karpov's "deep, infiltrating style and subtle positional feeling", to use the description by Kasparov. From a seemingly innocuous opening, White is 'suddenly' outplayed positionally in very few moves.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 ♗f4!?

I have toyed with this rare move myself, but it doesn't give White much. Its main virtue is that it sidesteps theory.

4...♗b7 5 e3 ♗e7 6 ♘c3

6 h3 is an alternative, providing a square for the bishop before it is attacked by ...♘h5.

6...♘h5 7 ♗g3 d6 8 ♗d3 ♘d7 9 0-0

The late Tony Miles, a great connoisseur of this line, preferred 9 ♕c2 g6 10 ♗e4! against Andersson in Amsterdam 1978, with an edge for White after 10...♗xe4 11 ♕xe4 0-0 12 ♕c6 a6 13 a4! ♖a7 14 a5, although the game was later drawn.

9...g6 10 h3?!

This seems unnecessarily obliging. 10 ♗e4, along the lines of Miles-Andersson above, seems more prudent.

10...♘xg3 11 fxg3 0-0 12 ♖c1 ♗f6 13 ♖c2!

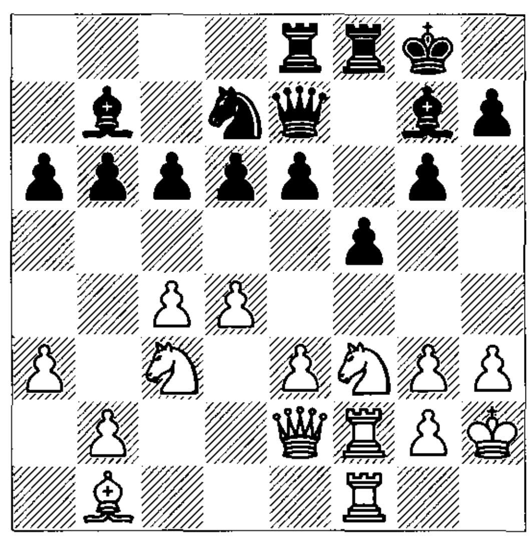
This was Spassky's idea. The half-open f-file provides ample opportunities for White's rooks. However, Black is solid and banks on the long-term power of the two bishops.

13...♗g7 14 ♖cf2 ♕e7 15 ♔h2 a6 16 ♕e2 ♖ae8

Black is extremely flexible and calmly completes his development before initiating hostilities.

17 ♗b1 c6! 18 a3 f5! *(D)*

W



With his last two moves Black has finally become active in the centre. He threatens 19...d5 and 20...♕d6, after which g3 is a nuisance. Still, a waiting policy would be better for White than Spassky's next move, which opens the position for the two bishops.

19 e4?! c5!

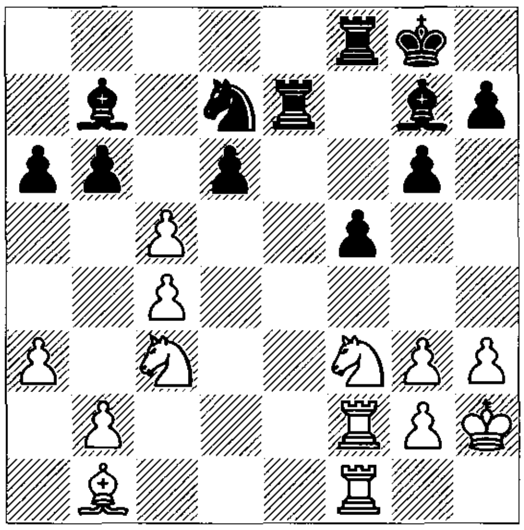
Counterattacking in the centre and forcing the opening of the position, much to the delight of the two bishops.

20 exf5 exf5 21 ♕xe7 ♖xe7 22 dxc5 *(D)*

22...bxc5!

Together with the next move, this forms a great and far-from-trivial concept, a testimony

B



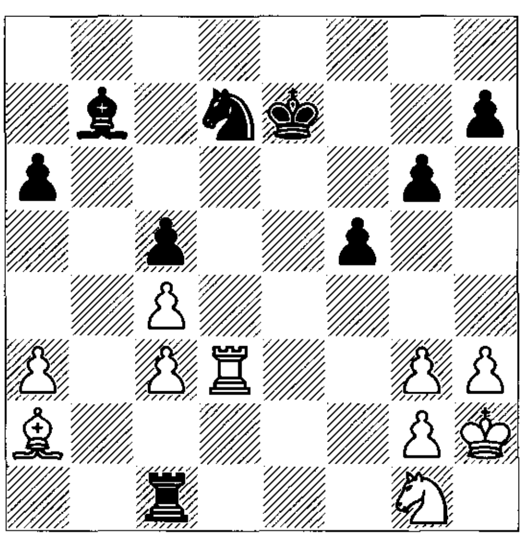
of Karpov's subtle positional feeling. I would probably have retaken with the d-pawn, when Black has some advantage, or maybe with the knight to exploit the e4-square. However, Karpov has seen deeper. His move is a subtle sacrifice of the d6-pawn in return for positional superiority.

23 ♖d1 ♗xc3!

Another example of Capablanca's transformation of advantages! Karpov has often been compared to the great Cuban, who also possessed a fantastic feel for the game. Black gives up his powerful bishop in order to cripple White's pawn-structure and imprison the bishop on b1.

24 bxc3 ♖f6 25 ♖fd2 ♖e3 26 ♘g1 ♔f7! 27 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 28 ♖xd6 ♔e7 29 ♖d3 ♖e1 30 ♗a2 ♖c1 *(D)*

W



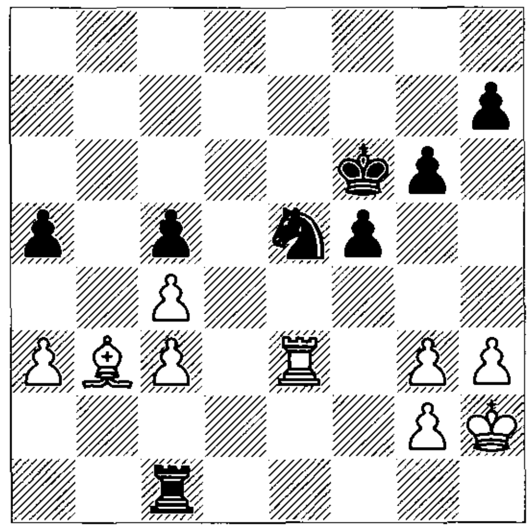
This is the position that Karpov has been aiming for. Despite his extra pawn, White is probably lost. His pawns are a mess and his pieces not much better.

31 ♘f3 ♗xf3!

Once more Karpov doesn't mind exchanging a long-range bishop, this time to obtain a strong knight vs a bad bishop.

32 ♖xf3 ♘e5 33 ♖e3 ♔f6 34 ♗b3 a5! *(D)*

W



White is almost is *zugzwang*. His king is trapped, the rook tied to the pawn on c3, and the bishop without prospects.

35 ♗a4

35 ♗a2 a4! completes the bind.

35...♘xc4

Harvest time.

36 ♖e8

36 ♖d3 ♘b2 and 36 ♖f3 ♘d2 are both immediately losing for White.

36...♖xc3 37 ♖c8 ♘e3 38 ♗b5 c4 39 ♔g1 ♖c2 40 ♗c6 c3 41 ♗f3 g5 42 g4 f4 0-1

A positional rout. However, Karpov is not just a positional player. As Kasparov pointed out, he is a practical, flexible player, ready to fight and play any position as it demands. He displayed these qualities early in his career.

Korchnoi – Karpov
Moscow 1971

1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 g3 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 ♗g2 g6!?

This is somewhat risky, although not necessarily bad. 5...♘c6 6 ♘c3 is more solid; then Black can choose 6...♘c7 (Rubinstein) or 6...e6 (Semi-Tarrasch).

6 d4!

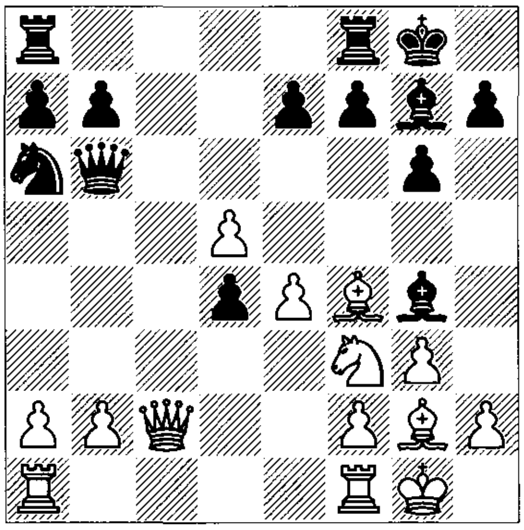
White exploits Black's omission of ...♘c6. Now 6...cxd4 is strongly met by 7 ♕xd4, so Black has to allow White a strong pawn-centre, hoping to attack it in Grünfeld style. The Grünfeld has never been a major part of Karpov's black repertoire, but he handles the task well!

6...♗g7 7 e4 ♘c7 8 d5 ♘b5!?

Black in turn tries to exploit the fact that White has not played ♘c3.

9 0-0 0-0 10 ♕c2 ♘a6 11 ♗f4 ♗g4 12 ♘bd2 ♘d4 13 ♘xd4 cxd4 14 ♘f3 ♕b6 *(D)*

W



The first critical position of the game. Karpov has played the opening in an uncharacteristically risky manner; usually he tries to be solid as Black. However, now Korchnoi falters. He should play 15 ♕d2 with an edge. White may have a small pull in the endgame after 15...♕b4, while Karpov suggests 15...♗xf3 16 ♗xf3 e5! 17 dxe6 fxe6!, with complicated play.

15 ♘e5?!

A natural move but Korchnoi probably underestimated Black's unconventional reply.

15...♗xe5!

No fear of ghosts! Black willingly gives up his defensive bishop, as he rightly judges that White cannot exploit the weakening of the dark squares around the king. With a series of powerful moves, Black grabs the initiative.

16 ♗xe5 f6! 17 ♗f4 ♖ac8 18 ♕a4 g5! 19 ♗c1

Forced, as 19 ♗d2 is met by 19...♕xb2.

19...♗e2 20 ♖e1 d3

Black has pushed White back and taken over the initiative. White is in some trouble but still in the game. For a while Korchnoi defends well but then falters.

21 ♗f1! ♗xf1 22 ♖xf1 ♖c2 23 ♗e3 ♘c5 24 ♕d4 *(D)*

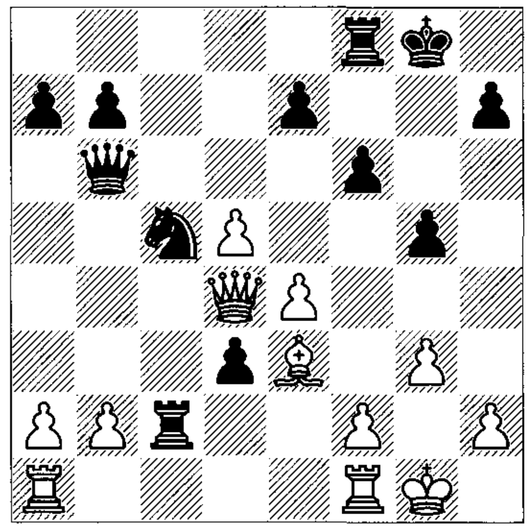
24...e5!

Another unconventional move. Black shifts his attention to White's e4-pawn and king's position.

25 dxe6 ♕xe6 26 ♖ac1?

The decisive mistake, based on a tactical oversight. Correct was 26 b4 ♘xe4 27 ♕xd3 ♖c3, when Black is only slightly better because of his more centralized pieces.

B



26...♖c8 27 b4 ♘xe4 28 ♖xc2

At move 26, Korchnoi presumably missed that 28 ♕xd3 is strongly met by the deflecting 28...♘xf2!. Now 29 ♖xf2 ♖xc1+ 30 ♗xc1 ♖xc1+ 31 ♔g2 ♕c6+ is a pretty hopeless ending, while 29 ♕xc2 loses to 29...♖xc2 30 ♖xc2 ♘h3+ 31 ♔g2 ♕xe3 32 ♖c8+ (or 32 ♔xh3 ♕e6+ 33 g4 ♕e3+ 34 ♔g2 ♕e4+, and the rook on c2 falls) 32...♔g7 33 ♖c7+ ♔g6 34 ♔xh3 ♕e2! 35 ♖fc1 g4+ 36 ♔h4 h5 37 ♖h1 ♕d2!, and White is mated, as indicated by Karpov.

28...dxc2

Now Black is just winning. Karpov tidies up neatly.

29 ♖c1 b6 30 f3 ♘d6 31 ♕d3 ♖c6 32 a4 ♕c4 33 ♕d2 ♘f7!

Threatening 34...♘e5 and 35...♘d3.

34 f4 g4 35 b5 ♖c8 36 ♕d7 h5 37 ♔f2 ♕c3! 38 ♕f5 ♖e8! 0-1

After 39 ♕g6+ ♔f8, the bishop on e3 falls.

Despite his positional reputation, Karpov is well versed in the art of tactics and attack. It is exactly this ability to play all kinds of positions that characterizes this era in chess history. Let us conclude this chapter with an attractive attacking game from Karpov's hand.

Karpov – Hübner
Tilburg 1982

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 dxe4 4 ♘xe4 ♗f5

The Classical Caro-Kann has been one of my main weapons as Black for many years.

5 ♘g3 ♗g6 6 h4 h6 7 ♘f3 ♘d7 8 h5 ♗h7 9 ♗d3 ♗xd3 10 ♕xd3 ♘gf6 11 ♗f4 e6 12 0-0-0 ♗e7 13 ♘e5 0-0 14 c4!?

White has other moves here, such as 14 ♔b1. The text-move is the most ambitious.

14...c5 15 d5! ♘xe5?!

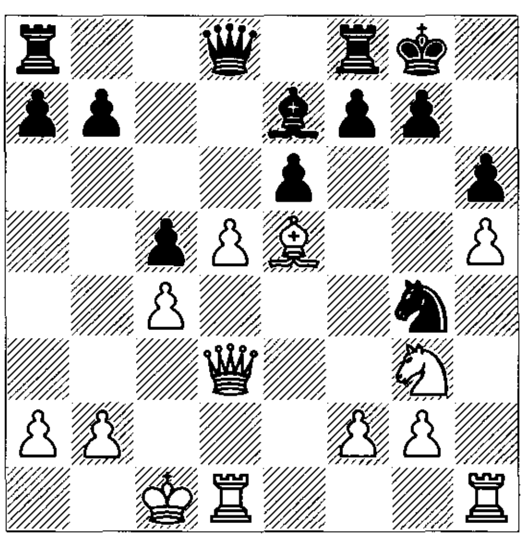
This – in combination with the following move – invites White to sacrifice a piece for a strong attack. I have twice tried 15...♗d6!? here, an interesting idea by my Danish compatriot, IM Karsten Rasmussen. After 16 ♘g6 ♗xf4+ 17 ♘xf4 ♕c7!, White must make a decision:

a) 18 ♖h4 ♖ad8 19 dxe6 ♘e5! 20 ♕e2 ♖xd1+ 21 ♔xd1 (21 ♕xd1 ♘xc4 22 ♘f5 fxe6 23 ♘e7+ ♕xe7 24 ♘g6 ♕f7 25 ♖xc4 ♖e8 26 ♖xc5 ♘d5 was approximately equal in the stem game Hellers-Rasmussen, Esbjerg 1988) 21...fxe6 22 ♔c1 ♕d6 23 a3 ♖f7 24 ♔b1 ♘c6 25 ♘g6 ♘d4 26 ♕e5 ♕xe5 27 ♘xe5 ♖f8 28 f3 ½-½ Almasi-L.B.Hansen, Altensteig 1993.

b) 18 ♕e3 led to an entertaining draw in Ernst-L.B.Hansen, Haninge 1992, after 18...♘b6 19 b3 exd5 20 ♘f5 ♘e4 21 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 22 ♖xd5 ♖fe8 23 ♖h4 ♘g5 24 ♖xc5 ♖xe3 25 ♖xc7 ♖e2 26 f4 ♘e4 27 ♖g4 ♖d8! (otherwise Black is in trouble) 28 ♖xg7+ ♔h8 29 ♖cxf7 ♖d1+! ½-½, as 30 ♔xd1 ♘c3+ 31 ♔c1 ♘xa2+ 32 ♔b1 ♘c3+ 33 ♔c1 (not 33 ♔a1?? ♖a2#) 33...♘a2+ is a perpetual.

16 ♗xe5 ♘g4 *(D)*

W



17 ♗xg7!

While this is not entirely clear, it is very hard for Black to defend.

17...♔xg7 18 ♕e2 ♗g5+ 19 ♔b1 ♘f6 20 dxe6 ♕c8 21 e7!

This is White's point. The sacrifice is long-term and gives him a powerful passed pawn and a continuing attack as compensation for the piece.

21...♖e8 22 ♖d6!

A key move that prevents 22...♕e6.

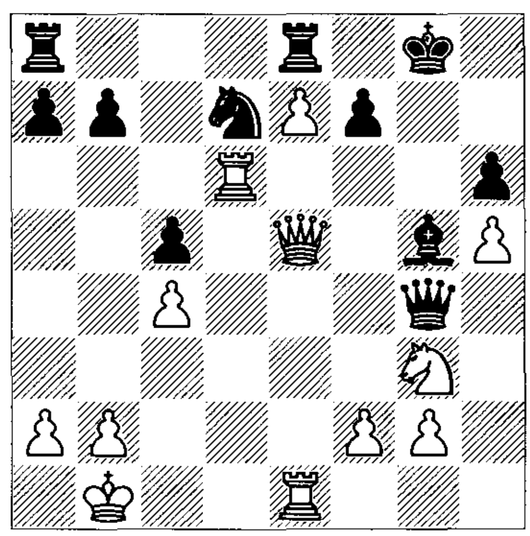
22...♕g4?!

According to Hübner, 22...♗f4! 23 ♖xf6 ♔xf6 24 ♕f3 ♕c7 is better, when his analysis continued 25 ♖h4 ♔xe7 26 ♖xf4 ♔f8 27 ♘e4 ♖ad8 with good defensive chances for Black. White can also try the computer-move 25 ♖e1!? ♖xe7 26 ♕c3+, which may lead to a draw by repetition after 26...♗e5 27 ♕f3+ ♗f4 (27...♔g7? 28 ♘f5+ ♔f8 29 ♘xe7 ♕xe7 30 ♕f5 followed by 31 f4 favours White) 28 ♕c3+ ♗e5, while Black could consider avoiding the repetition by 26...♖e5, when after 27 ♘e2 ♔e7 28 ♘xf4 ♖xe1+ 29 ♕xe1+ ♔f8 30 ♘d5 followed by 31 ♕c3 a double-edged position arises, in which White has compensation for the minor material investment, but hardly more than that.

23 ♕e5 ♔g8 24 ♖e1 ♘d7?! *(D)*

Black's last chance was 24...♘xh5 25 ♖e4 ♘f4 26 ♘f5 f6 27 ♕xc5, when White may be better, but the game is still very much in progress.

W



25 ♖xd7! ♕xd7 26 ♘f5 f6

This is forced, but now White obtains two powerful passed pawns that strangle Black. The extra rook is without consequence here, as Black can neither activate it, nor sacrifice it back for the pawns.

27 ♕d5+ ♕xd5 28 cxd5 ♗f4 29 g3 ♗c7 30 ♔c2!

There is no need to rush with the d6 advance.

30...b5 31 ♘xh6+ ♔h7 32 ♘f5 ♖g8 33 d6 ♗a5 34 ♖e6! ♖g5 35 ♖xf6 ♖xh5 36 d7

A beautiful position!

36...♖h2 37 ♘e3 1-0

It is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he already knows.
EPICTETUS

6 Creative Concreteness

No advantage, no improvement, can be found in what is obvious, or identical, for everyone. We must look higher and dig deeper, move beyond the basic and universal.
GARRY KASPAROV

The term Creative Concreteness may seem like an oxymoron – the two parts of the notion can be seen as opposites. However, in fact I think that the term describes quite well how chess has evolved during the past two decades. I credit Garry Kasparov as the 'founding father' of this development, which is why I have indicated 1985 as the starting point of this phase – the year that Kasparov won the World Championship from Karpov. In my view chess has become more concrete *as well as* more creative since then. Let me explain.

Undoubtedly chess has become more concrete in recent years. Given that generic positional nuances these days will rarely be enough to win games in top chess – as all top players know the teachings of Steinitz, Capablanca and Nimzowitsch – top players have increasingly started to look for advantages in the detail. That means getting beyond the generic level taught by the old masters and into the specifics of calculation. Today's top players calculate far more variations than their famous predecessors. The quote by Kasparov at the top of this chapter illustrates this well.

This development has been facilitated by the rise of chess computers of grandmaster strength. All chess-players – regardless of strength – have access to a top-class analytical assistant, willing to work 24 hours a day. No doubt there has been a spill-over effect here: during analysis, players get accustomed to the computer constantly finding hidden tactics and surprising ideas, so they increasingly start looking for such specifics during the game. In practice this means more and deeper calculations. Even reflectors and theorists, who tend to rely very much on intuition, are forced into calculating more variations due to the competitive pressure. I have witnessed this myself during my 20 years in international competition. Being a reflector, and accordingly not a 'natural calculator', my results, especially in recent years, have become more and more dependent on my 'calculation form'. If I am fit and my calculations sharp, I usually do well at tournaments; if my calculations slacken just a little bit, my results immediately deteriorate. Chess is becoming a more and more physical game; to the added pressure for more, deeper and sharper calculations, FIDE has added the strain of continuously reduced time-controls. It is no coincidence that we see more and more young and energetic players taking over in chess.

So the value of calculation skills has soared. However, it is one thing to realize that you have to calculate more variations to stay competitive – actually being able to do it is another. Humans are not computers and we are not able to calculate the way computers do: a large brute-force search with relatively little pruning, so even crazy-looking ideas are examined. Humans need another processing approach when calculating variations. The generally recommended approach involves choosing *candidate moves*. When I was about 15, a member of my local chess club, Johannes Brix Hansen, a former national champion in correspondence chess, lent me Alexander Kotov's famous book *Think Like a Grandmaster* (in fact it was the Swedish version of this classic, which in that language is entitled something like *The Road to Mastery in Chess*). I still have it, as Brix Hansen sadly passed away shortly afterwards. It was when reading Kotov's explanation of candidate moves that I for the first time started thinking about how I calculate variations. Before then, calculation of variations to me was 'just something you did'. Did I really need a process for that? Yes, I did. Suddenly I got a tool to structure my calculation process, and my calculations quickly improved and my playing strength with it. More

specifically, I learnt to calculate more quickly and systematically, and that helped me avoid (as much as possible) the horrible time-pressure that I often seemed to find myself in during those years.

What is the process of candidate moves? It is the systematic process, in which a human being reduces the number of moves to be calculated from nearly endless to a handful or fewer. While the computer will look through a vast array of possible variations, the human will only seriously examine these few chosen candidate moves before deciding. One important feature of the process of candidate moves is that all candidates should be examined. As Lasker used to say: "If you find a good move, then look for a better one!" Certainly many players seem to fall into the trap of 'satisficing', that is, choosing the first move that seems decent in the calculations. That is a very common mistake. All candidate moves should be systematically examined, even if you have found one that looks good.

Obviously a key point in using the candidate-moves approach to structure your calculations is to be able to pick the *right* candidate moves. How do you know that the 3-5 candidates that you have chosen for further inspection are the right ones? This is where the creativity part of the term 'creative concreteness' comes in. In my view this is one of the key factors that made Kasparov the strongest chess-player of all time. He was better at picking the right candidate moves than anybody else in chess history. The process of selection of candidate moves is very much related to pattern recognition. We choose candidate moves for further inspection based on recognizable patterns from previous experience or analysis. That is why it is so important to devote systematic study to things like combinations, grandmaster games with your openings, and games by the old masters. That builds the required arsenal of patterns and thus facilitates the selection of candidate moves.

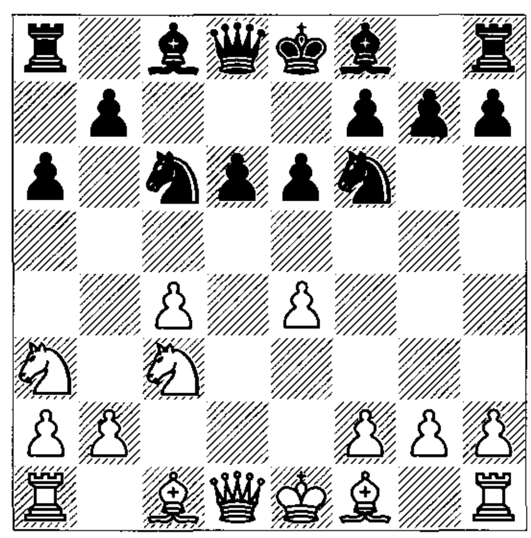
But someone has to invent the patterns in the first place, and Kasparov was better than any others at including new and surprising moves into the candidate-moves process – in preparation as well as over the board. Like Alekhine before him, Kasparov injected new life into chess at a time where Fischer and especially Karpov had perfected the lessons from the four previous paradigms – romantic, scientific, hypermodern and new dynamism. Karpov embodied the perfect synthesis of the four previous paradigms, and just as Alekhine learned from Capablanca and then took chess to a new level, Kasparov in my opinion did the same – he learned his lessons from Karpov and then opened the door to a new paradigm in chess. It is this new paradigm that I call Creative Concreteness. Kasparov himself in *How Life Imitates Chess* combines creativity and concrete calculations this way: "creativity and order must reign together to guide calculation."

Karpov – Kasparov

World Ch match (game 16), Moscow 1985

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 ♘b5 d6 6 c4 ♘f6 7 ♘1c3 a6 8 ♘a3 *(D)*

B



8...d5!?

The first surprise! Kasparov had uncorked this move in the 12th game of the match, gaining a quick draw. Karpov presumably believed it was a one-off surprise – a costly mistake. In a later game against Van der Wiel in Brussels 1986, Karpov showed how White should play, but by then it was too late – Kasparov had run off with the World Championship title.

9 cxd5 exd5 10 exd5 ♘b4 11 ♗e2

The 12th game of the match was drawn after 11 ♗c4 ♗g4 12 ♗e2 ♗xe2 13 ♕xe2+ ♕e7 14 ♗e3 ♘bxd5 15 ♘c2 ♘xe3 16 ♘xe3 ♕e6 17 0-0 ♗c5 18 ♖fe1 0-0.

11...♗c5?! 12 0-0?!

Against Van der Wiel Karpov emerged with a solid advantage after 12 ♗e3! ♗xe3 13 ♕a4+! ♘d7 14 ♕xb4 ♗c5 15 ♕e4+ ♔f8 16 0-0,

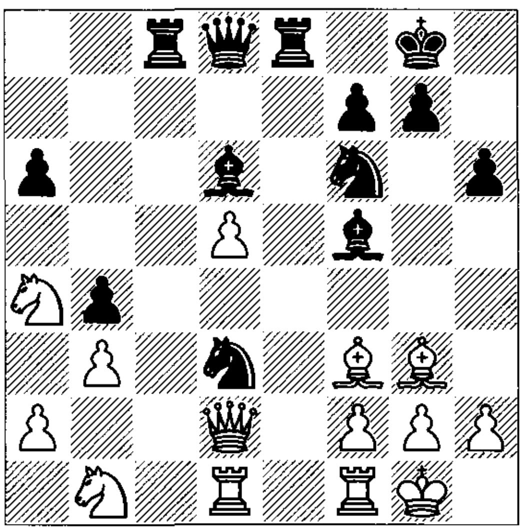
although the Dutch grandmaster escaped with a draw.

12...0-0 13 ♗f3 ♗f5 14 ♗g5 ♖e8 15 ♕d2 b5!

The deep point of Black's play is that he doesn't really want the d5-pawn back. This pawn merely restricts White by keeping his pieces tied to its defence. And the knight on a3 is not a pretty sight.

16 ♖ad1 ♘d3 17 ♘ab1 h6 18 ♗h4 b4 19 ♘a4 ♗d6 20 ♗g3 ♖c8 21 b3 *(D)*

B



21...g5!

Kasparov's play in this game is a perfect example of Creative Concreteness, combining creative strokes with concrete calculation. The text-move epitomizes the notion. At first sight it looks surprising, as Black voluntarily weakens his own king's position, and I wonder how many players would have included this move in their candidate-moves process – especially with the World Championship at stake! However, in hindsight the move makes perfect sense. White's pieces are scattered around the board, and much depends on the bishop on f3, which defends the d5-pawn and the king. By harassing this bishop and gaining space on the kingside, Black makes it hard for White to coordinate his defence.

22 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 23 g3

This weakens the light squares around the king, but something had to be done against the threat of ...g4.

23...♘d7!

Black immediately directs his attention towards the weakened light squares.

24 ♗g2 ♕f6!

Black prevents White from bringing the stranded knight on a4 into play via b2 and eyes f2 and f3 in the process.

25 a3 a5 26 axb4 axb4 27 ♕a2 ♗g6 28 d6

Karpov hopes to buy a little relief by giving back the pawn. Instead, 28 ♘d2? loses to 28...♖e2 but now after 28...♕xd6 White can play 29 ♘d2 with the idea 29...♖e2 30 ♗f3. However, Black need not take the pawn at once.

28...g4! 29 ♕d2 ♔g7 30 f3?!

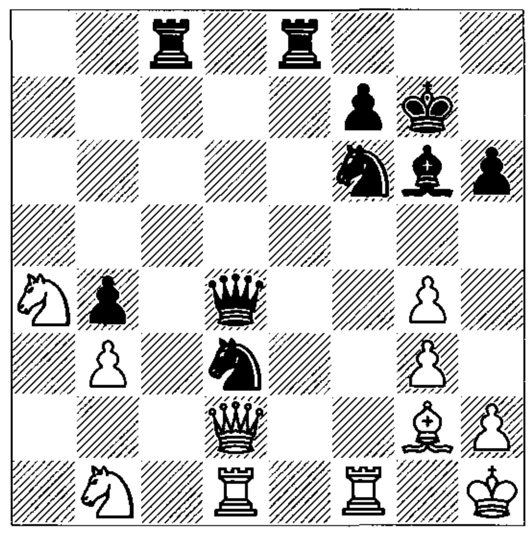
A somewhat desperate attempt to generate counterplay, but it turns out merely to weaken the g1-a7 diagonal decisively. However, it is not easy to suggest anything better.

30...♕xd6

Finally Black takes the pawn.

31 fxg4 ♕d4+ 32 ♔h1 ♘f6! *(D)*

W



33 ♖f4 ♘e4!

The decisive infiltration.

34 ♕xd3 ♘f2+ 35 ♖xf2 ♗xd3 36 ♖fd2 ♕e3! 37 ♖xd3 ♖c1!

With three pieces for the queen, White is doing fine when it comes to a head-count, but his pieces are too uncoordinated and his position hopeless.

38 ♘b2 ♕f2! 39 ♘d2 ♖xd1+ 40 ♘xd1 ♖e1+ 0-1

This brilliant game enabled Kasparov to take the lead in the match, and it is certainly one of the key games in chess history.

Kasparov – Smirin

USSR Ch, Moscow 1988

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 d4 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘e7 9 ♘d2

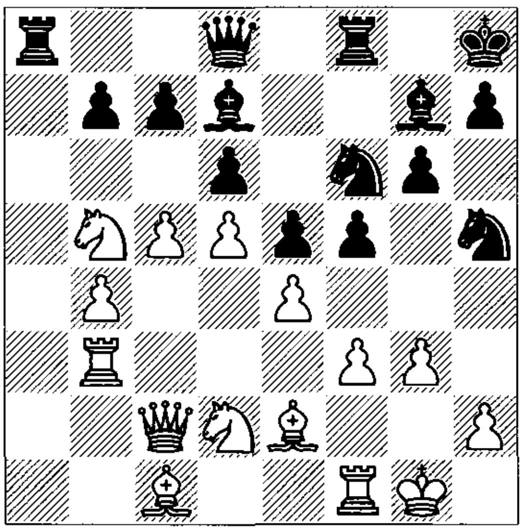
Since the mid-1990s, the Bayonet Attack, 9 b4, has been all the rage.

9...a5 10 a3 ♘d7 11 ♖b1 f5 12 b4 b6

And here 12...♔h8 is usually preferred, as Kasparov himself played in a number of games.

One example is the fantastic game Karpov-Kasparov, Tilburg 1991, which entered immense complications after 13 f3 ♘g8 14 ♕c2 ♘gf6 15 ♘b5 axb4 16 axb4 ♘h5 17 g3 ♘df6 18 c5 ♗d7 19 ♖b3 *(D)*.

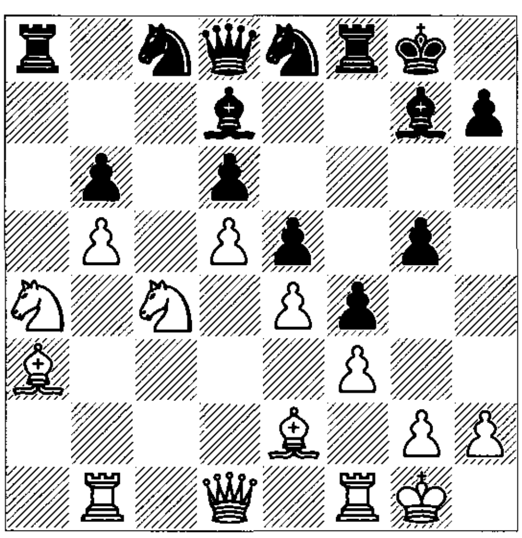
B



19...♘xg3!? 20 hxg3 ♘h5 21 f4! exf4 22 c6 bxc6 23 dxc6 ♘xg3 24 ♖xg3 fxg3 25 cxd7 g2 26 ♖f3 ♕xd7 27 ♗b2 fxe4 28 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 29 ♗xg7+ ♕xg7 30 ♕xe4 ♕f6 31 ♘f3. Eventually the game ended up in an ending with two knights and a bishop for Karpov vs Kasparov's king and lone rook. For 50 moves Karpov in vain tried to win, before Kasparov was able to sacrifice his rook and force stalemate after 114 moves!

13 f3 f4 14 ♘a4 axb4 15 axb4 g5 16 c5 ♘f6 17 cxd6 cxd6 18 b5 ♗d7 19 ♘c4 ♘c8 20 ♗a3 ♘e8 *(D)*

W



Both sides have attacked on 'his' wing, as is common in the King's Indian. However, now Kasparov uncorks a surprising move that leaves Black with an unpleasant choice: either to keep the kingside closed and accept a cramped position with no counterplay, or to allow White to open a second front on the kingside. Smirin chooses the second option but falls victim to another Kasparov show in the spirit of Creative Concreteness!

21 g4!

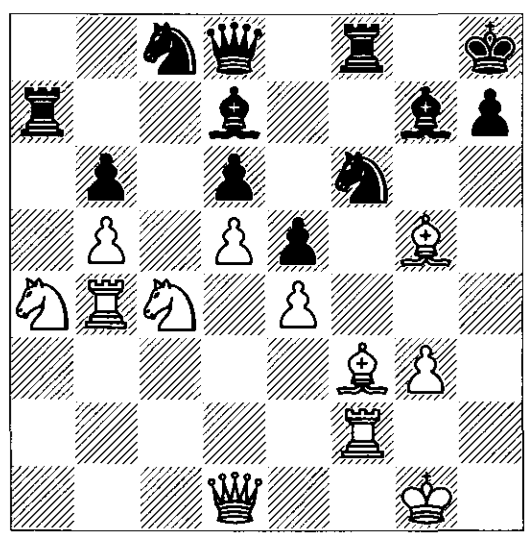
This counterplan against Black's g-pawn advance in the King's Indian rose to prominence in the 1980s. Before then, the common rule of thumb was never to weaken your position on the wing where you are weaker. However, such generic rules have been questioned in the past few decades. Now each position is evaluated in detail to see if the rule applies or not! However, the rules are still an underlying factor of strategic play, as we shall see later in the game.

21...fxg3 22 hxg3 g4 23 ♗c1!

Kasparov shifts his attention to the newly-opened kingside. Black, being tied to the defence of the b-pawn, cannot regroup as swiftly as White. This is a typical outcome of a space advantage: the side enjoying the spatial plus can more easily shift play from one wing to the other. Yes, Steinitz's rules still apply even in our times!

23...gxf3 24 ♗xf3 ♘f6 25 ♗g5 ♖a7 26 ♖f2! ♖b7 27 ♖b3 ♖a7 28 ♖b1 ♖b7 29 ♖b3 ♖a7 30 ♖b4 ♔h8 *(D)*

W



31 ♕f1?!

A far from trivial move with a deep creative point and supported by rigorous concrete calculations. However, as pointed out by Stohl, it is not White's strongest as Black has a deeply hidden resource on move 38 which was missed by Kasparov, Smirin, and all commentators at the time. Instead, Stohl recommends 31 ♗h5 or 31 ♗e3 ♖b7 32 g4!? as more promising continuations.

31...♗xb5 32 ♖xb5 ♖xa4 33 ♗g2!

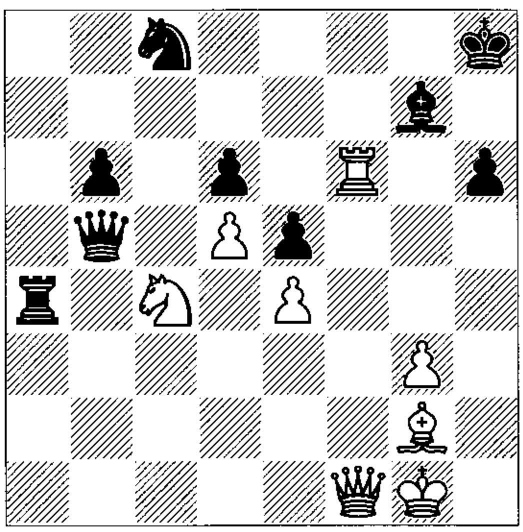
Now it becomes clear that Black has major difficulties escaping the pin. There is only one way, the tactically based hit on the rook on b5.

33...h6 34 ♗h4 ♕e8!

The only defence, attacking the white rook on b5.

35 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 36 ♖xf6 ♕xb5 *(D)*

W



37 ♖e6

Given Black's great defensive resource on move 38, White perhaps should have considered 37 ♗h3 here.

37...♔g8

Necessary to prevent 38 ♕f7. Thus 37...♖xc4? (37...♕xc4? 38 ♖e8+ mates) loses to 38 ♕f7! ♕c5+ 39 ♔h2 ♖c1 40 ♖e8+ ♔h7 41 ♕f5#.

38 ♗h3! ♖xc4?

The decisive error. As discovered by Stohl, Black could have saved himself by the surprising computer-like move 38...h5!, when Stohl gives 39 ♘e3!? ♕xf1+ 40 ♗xf1! ♖xe4 41 ♘f5 ♗f8 42 ♖e8 ♘e7! 43 ♘xe7+ ♔f7 44 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 45 ♘f5 as White's best, but he is only very marginally better in this endgame, and a draw is the most likely result.

This defence was not found by any contemporary analysts; it was only discovered by Stohl years after the game, possibly with computer assistance. It is an interesting coincidence in a historical perspective that in another famous game, Alekhine-Bogoljubow, Triberg 1921, analysed in *Foundations of Chess Strategy*, a defensive resource based on the small pawn move ...h5 was missed by analysts for decades, before being discovered in the editing process of my earlier book. The human mind still fights prejudice and centuries of built-in habits in the selection of candidate moves, and ...h5 does not match any preconceived rules for this selection!

39 ♖xh6!

The brilliant final touch. Black is inevitably mated when the bishop reaches e6.

39...♗xh6 40 ♗e6+ ♔h8 41 ♕f6+ 1-0

41...♔h7 (41...♗g7 42 ♕h4+) 42 ♕f7+ ♗g7 43 ♗f5+ ♔h8 44 ♕h5+ ♔g8 45 ♗e6+ mates.

Creative Concreteness is not only apparent in practical play – the interplay between creativity in selecting candidate moves and then subjecting these to rigorous calculations. Supported by advances in computer technology – databases as well as chess-playing programs of grandmaster strength – the past two decades have seen rapid advances in opening theory. Some opening lines have even been analysed way into the endgame. More and more often, novelties are uncorked well beyond move 20. The driving force in this development too is Kasparov and his team, who in the 1980s and 1990s raised the bar for opening preparation by incorporating the new technologies into Botvinnik's old systematic approach to opening preparation. Top chess nowadays is very much about opening preparation but as I have mentioned before, even top players should be careful not to neglect working on other parts of their game as well.

Kasparov – Anand

World Ch match (game 10), New York 1995

One more key game from chess history! In the PCA World Championship match held at the top of World Trade Centre, Anand had just taken the lead by winning game 9 after eight consecutive draws. However, in this game he ran into a well-prepared novelty by Kasparov. Upon winning this game – almost entirely from home analysis – Kasparov was unstoppable, taking three of the next four games as well.

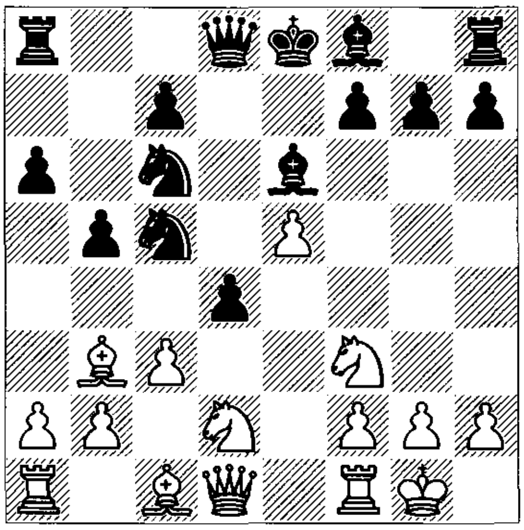
1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♘xe4 6 d4 b5 7 ♗b3 d5 8 dxe5 ♗e6 9 ♘bd2 ♘c5 10 c3 d4 *(D)*

11 ♘g5!?

Karpov's fantastic novelty from the World Championship match in 1978 against Korchnoi in Baguio City. Coincidentally, it was also in the 10th game of that match that Karpov uncorked this surprising shot.

11...dxc3

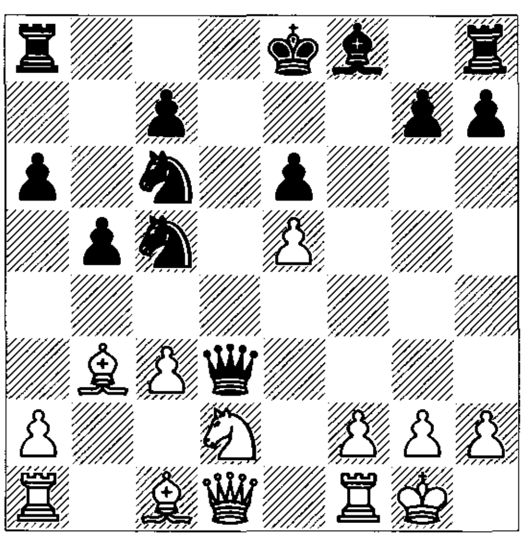
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Anand follows Korchnoi's lead, just as he did in the 6th game of the match. Black has two other moves here, 11...♗d5 and 11...♕xg5. Anand tried the former against Svidler in Dos Hermanas 1999 but was lucky to draw – it was the famous game where Svidler offered a draw in a winning position with three passed pawns versus Anand's lone knight. In recent years Vishy has seemed to prefer 11...♕xg5, with which he has achieved solid draws against Shirov in 2004 and Grishchuk in 2005.

12 ♘xe6 fxe6 13 bxc3 ♕d3 *(D)*

W



14 ♗c2!

Kasparov's novelty! In game 6 he played 14 ♘f3, just as Karpov did against Korchnoi in 1978. Korchnoi replied 14...♕xd1 15 ♗xd1 ♗e7 16 ♗e3 ♘d3 17 ♗b3 ♔f7 and managed to draw. Anand instead uncorked a novelty found by his second Ubilava: 14...0-0-0!, and after 15 ♕e1 ♘xb3 16 axb3 ♔b7 17 ♗e3 ♗e7 18 ♗g5 h6 19 ♗xe7 ♘xe7 20 ♘d4 ♖xd4! 21 cxd4 ♕xb3 22 ♕e3 ♕xe3 23 fxe3 ♘d5 24 ♔f2 ♔b6 25 ♔e2 a5 26 ♖f7 a4 27 ♔d2 c5 28 e4 the players agreed to a draw in a highly complicated position in which White was later found to hold the better chances. The text-move is stronger and more forceful; although Black may be able to hold, he is walking a tightrope.

14...♕xc3 15 ♘b3! ♘xb3

The alternative is 15...♖d8, which has later been tried in a few high-level encounters. In Khalifman-Hraček, Pärnu 1996 White was better after 16 ♗d2 ♖xd2?! 17 ♘xd2 ♘xe5 18 ♘b3 ♘ed7 19 ♘d4 ♗d6 20 ♖c1. However, Mamedyarov revived the variation when in his game against Naiditsch, Pamplona 2004 he survived with a perpetual check after 16...♕xe5 (rather than sacrificing the exchange) 17 ♖e1 ♕d5 18 ♕g4 ♘d4 19 ♘xc5 ♗xc5 20 ♕xg7 ♖f8 21 ♗xh7 ♖d7 22 ♕g6+ ♔d8 23 ♗h6 ♘f3+! 24 gxf3 ♕xf3 25 ♕g5+ ♔c8 26 ♕xc5 ♕g4+.

16 ♗xb3 ♘d4

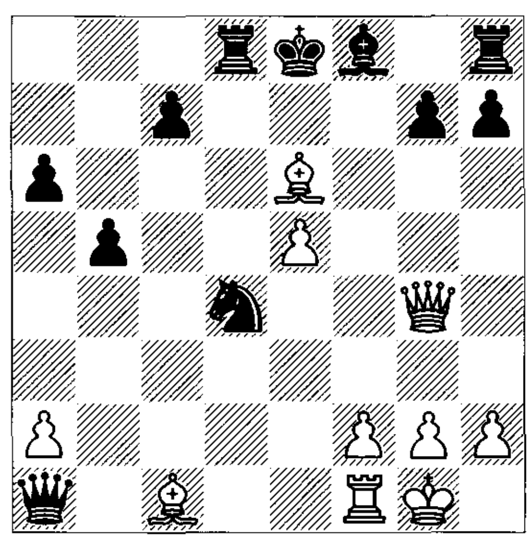
Facing a well-prepared Kasparov, it is understandable that Anand does not take the offered rook, as he can be certain that Kasparov has found something. One possible line is 16...♕xa1 17 ♕h5+ g6 18 ♕f3 ♘d8 19 ♕f6! ♖g8 20 ♗xe6 ♗e7 21 ♗d7+! ♔xd7 22 e6+, and White wins the queen with a clear advantage.

17 ♕g4! ♕xa1

Now Black doesn't really have other options than taking the rook.

18 ♗xe6 ♖d8 *(D)*

W



19 ♗h6! ♕c3 20 ♗xg7 ♕d3

The only defence, but now White regains his sacrificed material with interest.

21 ♗xh8 ♕g6

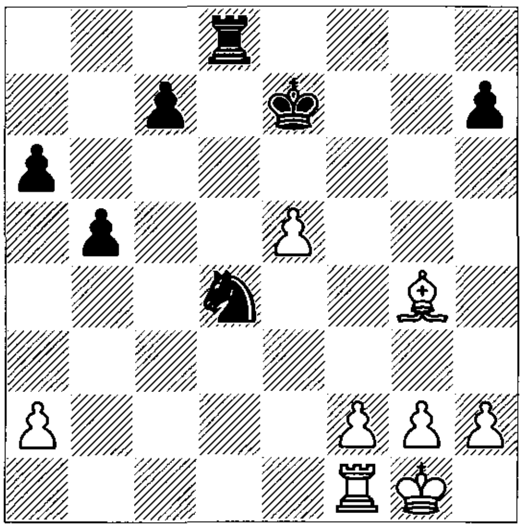
Only now was Kasparov out of his home analysis, with a close-to-won position.

22 ♗f6 ♗e7 23 ♗xe7 ♕xg4 24 ♗xg4 ♔xe7 *(D)*

25 ♖c1!

The last difficult move. White has to prevent Black from generating counterplay on the

W



queenside before he starts pushing his own pawns.

25...c6 26 f4 a5 27 ♔f2 a4 28 ♔e3 b4 29 ♗d1!

Another careful prophylactic move that halts Black's pawns and frees the path for White's own passed pawns.

29...a3 30 g4 ♖d5 31 ♖c4 c5 32 ♔e4 ♖d8 33 ♖xc5 ♘e6 34 ♖d5 ♖c8 35 f5 ♖c4+ 36 ♔e3 ♘c5 37 g5 ♖c1 38 ♖d6 1-0

White wins after 38...b3 39 f6+ ♔f8 40 ♗h5! ♘b7 41 ♖a6 ♖c8 42 axb3.

Modern top players have followed Kasparov's lead, and many games are nowadays decided out of the opening. However, obviously such an approach also contains a certain amount of risk. Let's take a few examples from the top players' new pet battlefield, the Anti-Moscow Variation of the Semi-Slav.

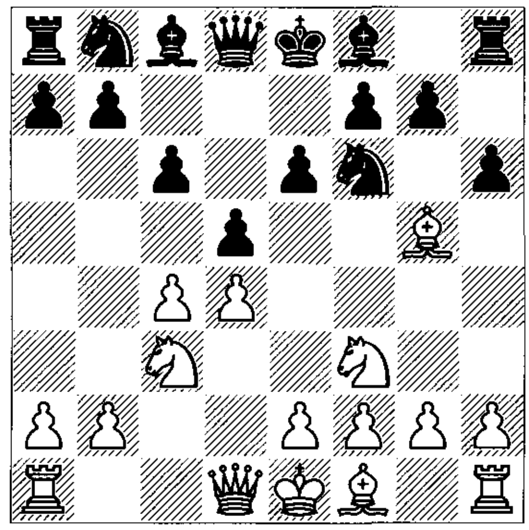
Gustafsson – Rodshtein

FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2007

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 ♗g5 h6 *(D)*

This is the Moscow Variation. None of the world's best players seem to want to place their trust in Botvinnik's 5...dxc4 any more.

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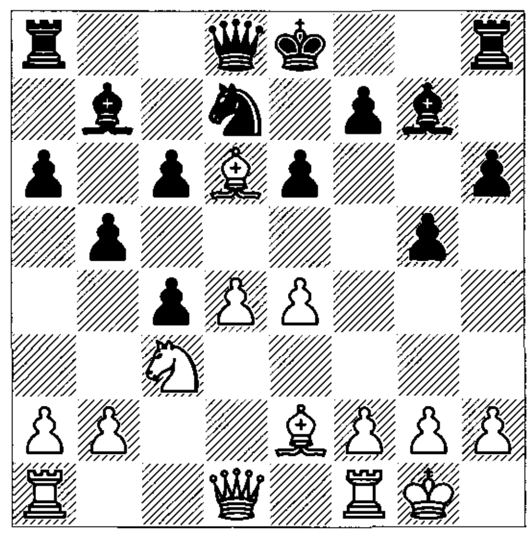


6 ♗h4!?

There it is, the Anti-Moscow! When I started playing the Semi-Slav as Black in the early 1990s, 6 ♗xf6 was almost automatic. Now it is a rarity, although it is seen from time to time. I can't help wondering whether this shift is really due to 6 ♗h4 being stronger than 6 ♗xf6, or if it is all a matter of fashion. However, who am I to judge? I do not pretend to be an expert on this line, and it is played consistently by world-class players such as Kramnik, Anand, Aronian, Radjabov and Shirov, some of them even with both colours.

6...dxc4 7 e4 g5 8 ♗g3 b5 9 ♗e2 ♗b7 10 0-0 ♘bd7 11 ♘e5 ♗g7 12 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 13 ♗d6 a6 *(D)*

W



We have reached one of the main positions of the Anti-Moscow. White has several moves at his disposal. Kramnik chose 14 ♗h5 against Anand at the World Championship in Mexico City 2007 but did not achieve much after 14...♗f8 15 ♗xf8 ♖xf8 16 e5 ♕b6 17 b3!? (17 ♘e4 was Radjabov-Anand, Mainz rapid 2006, which Black won) 17...0-0-0 18 bxc4 ♘xe5 19 c5 ♕a5 20 ♘e4 ♕b4 (20...♘c4!? may be even better, as played shortly after in Elianov-Anand, European Clubs Cup, Kemer 2007; that game was drawn after 21 ♗e2 f5 22 ♗xc4 fxe4 23 ♗xe6+ ♔b8 24 ♖e1 ♕c3 25 ♖xe4 ♕b2 26 f3 ♖f4 27 ♕c1 ♕xc1+ 28 ♖xc1 ♖xd4 29 ♖xf4 gxf4 30 g4 fxg3) 21 ♘d6+ ♖xd6 22 cxd6 ♘d7 23 a4 ♕xd6. Such an uneven distribution of material is typical of the era of Creative Concreteness.

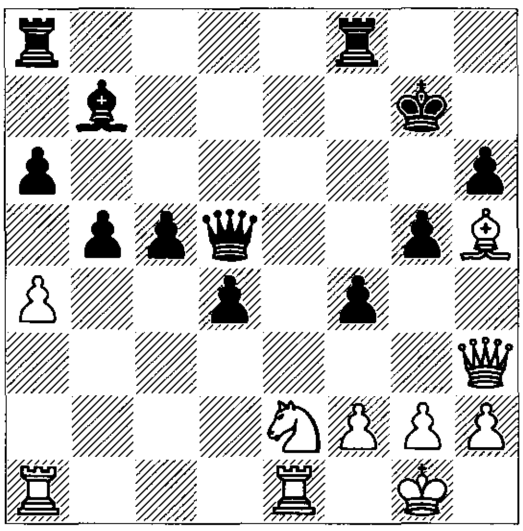
In Wijk aan Zee 2008 Radjabov beat Anand with the modest-looking 14 ♖e1. However, later

in the same tournament Radjabov returned to 14 ♗h5 in his game against Van Wely (which he only narrowly managed to draw).

14 a4 e5 15 d5

The alternative is 15 ♗g4. This was Kramnik's choice in Wijk aan Zee 2008 against Aronian. After 15...exd4 16 e5 c5 17 ♖e1 ♘xe5 18 ♗xe5 0-0 19 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 20 ♘e2 f5 21 ♗h5 f4 22 b4 cxb3 23 ♕xb3 ♕d5 24 ♕h3 *(D)* a chaotic position arose.

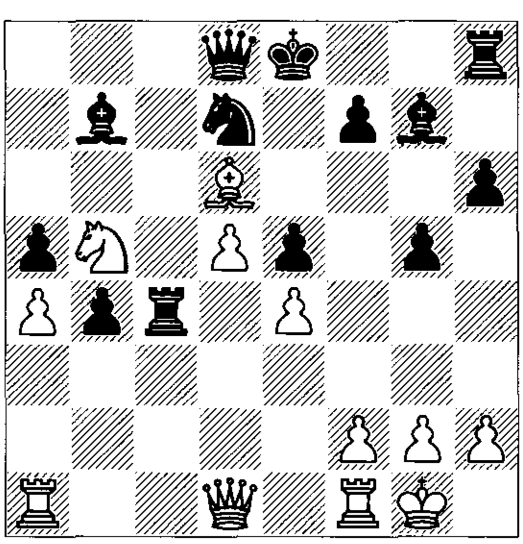
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With his potent pawn avalanche Black seems fine, but he has problems with the safety of his king, so presumably White is somewhat better. Looking at the position it seems almost unbelievable that this game ended at move 110 with Kramnik finally grinding out a win from the theoretically drawn ending rook+f+h vs rook as Aronian ran short of time. It is important for the modern chess-player to work continuously on his technique. With the shortening of time-controls by FIDE (albeit tempered by the positive impact of the time increment per move), even the world's best find it hard to defend difficult theoretical endings.

15...c5 16 b4! cxb4 17 ♗xb4 a5 18 ♗d6 b4 19 ♘b5 ♖c8 20 ♗xc4!? ♖xc4 *(D)*

W



So far both players had played quickly, as they were both 'in book'. At this point Gustafsson uncorked his novelty, after which Rodshtein thought for an hour! In this way White won the battle of preparation, and subsequently the game. However, from an objective viewpoint the position seems fine for Black. Peter Heine Nielsen, regular second of Anand, explains in the Danish monthly magazine *Skakbladet* that the Anand/Nielsen team analysed this position extensively before the World Championship in Mexico. Their verdict was that Black holds, and the present game doesn't seem to alter that verdict, although White eventually wins.

21 ♕b3!?

An earlier game Izoria-Erenburg, FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2005, ended in a repetition of moves after 21 ♖c1 ♖xc1 22 ♕xc1 ♕b6 23 ♘c7+ ♔d8 24 ♘b5 ♔e8 25 ♘c7+.

21...♕c8!?

21...♖c8 was played the following day at the same tournament, in the rapid tiebreak game Zhao Jun-Harikrishna! This shows how quickly opening theory evolves at the highest level these days. After 22 ♖ac1 ♗f8 23 ♖xc8 ♕xc8 24 ♕e3 ♘f6? (now White is winning; 24...♕c2 was a much better chance, intending 25 ♖c1 ♕b2 or 25 ♕a7 ♗c8, when Black is still in the game) 25 ♖c1 ♕d8 (this is hopeless, but 25...♕d7 26 ♕b6 was not much better) 26 ♗xe5?! (26 ♘c7+ ♔d7 27 ♗xe5 wins on the spot) 26...♗e7 27 d6 0-0 28 dxe7 ♕xe7 29 ♗d6 ♕xe4 30 ♕xe4 ♗xe4 31 ♗xf8 ♔xf8 32 ♘d4 White was winning and duly converted his advantage into victory in 78 moves.

22 ♗c7!

White's creative point. Black must give up his queen, but he retains equal chances.

22...♕xc7 23 ♘xc7+ ♖xc7 24 ♖ac1 ♘c5 25 ♕h3 ♗c8?!

Black starts to drift. According to Gustafsson, 25...♗f8 is correct, with the idea 26 ♕f5 ♗g7!, after which White probably has nothing better than repeating moves by 27 ♕h3. If he wants to play for a win, he can try 27 ♕f3!?.

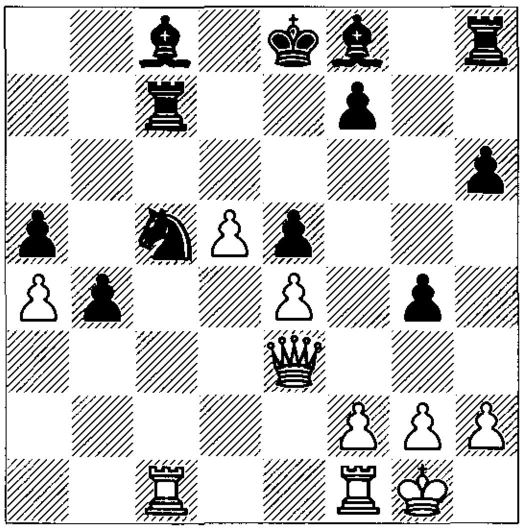
26 ♕f3! g4?

The decisive mistake – and Gustafsson knew that from home analysis! According to the German GM, the right defence was 26...♗d7! 27 d6 ♖c6 28 ♕e3 ♘xa4 29 ♖xc6 ♗xc6 30 ♕a7 0-0 31 d7 ♘c3 32 ♕c7 ♗xd7 33 ♕xd7 ♖b8,

and the two strong passed pawns should allow Black to hold.

27 ♕e3 ♗f8 *(D)*

W



28 f4!

Now we see the problem with 26...g4?. It allows White to open the centre, and with his lack of coordination Black is helpless.

28...gxf3 29 ♕xf3 f5 30 ♕g3! 1-0

White penetrates decisively via e5 or g6.

This nice victory helped Jan Gustafsson to advance to the second round of the World Cup where he had to face Levon Aronian – himself an expert in the Anti-Moscow Variation with both colours! Both games of this match featured this opening, and Aronian won the first game with White and drew the second to advance. Let's begin with the second game.

Gustafsson – Aronian

FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2007

First 16 moves as in Gustafsson-Rodshtein above! Then Aronian deviated with...

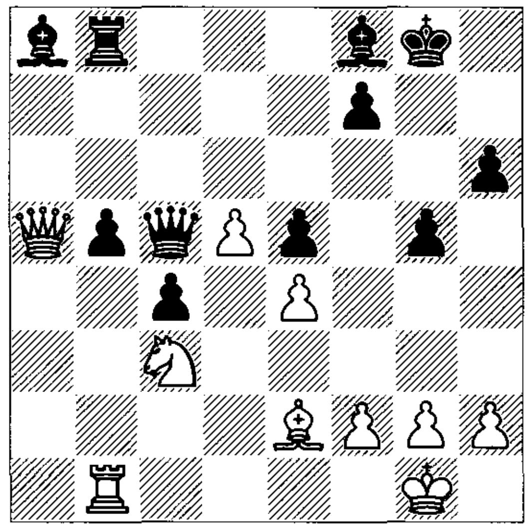
16...♕b6!

Objectively perhaps not better than 16...cxb4, but it is more forcing. White has to liquidate.

17 bxc5 ♘xc5 18 ♗xc5 ♕xc5 19 axb5 axb5 20 ♖xa8+ ♗xa8 21 ♕a1 0-0 22 ♕a5 ♖b8 23 ♖b1 ♗f8 *(D)*

This is all pretty forced after 16...♕b6. In his notes in the German monthly magazine *Schach*, Gustafsson explains that Aronian was still blitzing out his moves. The German too had reached this position in his preparation but had been seduced by the fact that initially the computer shows this to be advantageous for White, who is about to regain his pawn

W



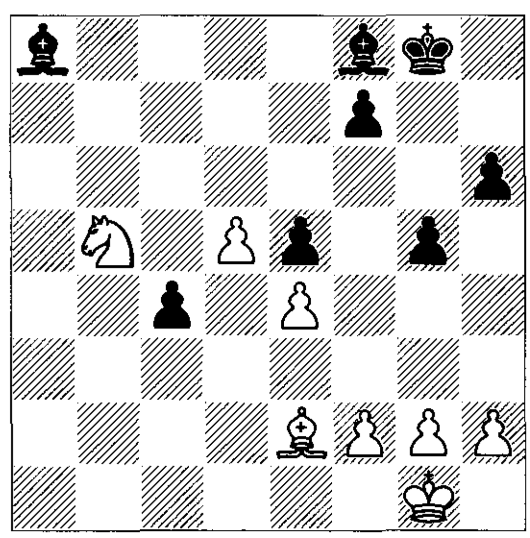
with some apparent pressure. However, the advantage quickly proves illusory. Indeed, White can win a pawn (which may be what convinced the computer program initially to suggest that White is better) but only to reach a totally drawn opposite-coloured bishop ending.

24 ♖xb5

A few days later in the same tournament Alekseev tried 24 ♘xb5 against Bareev, but he too did not obtain anything tangible. After 24...f5! 25 ♕a6 ♔h8 26 ♘c3 ♖xb1+ 27 ♘xb1 ♕b4 28 ♕xa8 ♕xb1+ 29 ♗f1 ♕b4 a draw was not far off.

24...♖xb5 25 ♕xb5 ♕xb5 26 ♘xb5 *(D)*

B



26...♗b7!

The last crucial move. To win the c4-pawn, White must accept the transformation into an opposite-coloured bishop ending.

27 ♗xc4 ♗a6! 28 ♔f1 ♗xb5 29 ♗xb5 ♗c5 30 f3 ♔f8 31 g3 ♔e7 32 ♔g2 ♗e3 33 ♔h3 ♗g1!

Preventing ♔g4-h5.

34 ♗c4 ♔d6 35 ♗a6 ♔c7 36 ♔g2 ♗e3 37 h4 gxh4 38 gxh4 ♔d6 39 ♔g3 ♔e7 40 ♔g4 f6 ½-½

Now let us turn to the first game of the Aronian-Gustafsson encounter. That was a great game that highlights two important characteristics of the present era of chess. First, the already-discussed *combination of creativity and concreteness*. Second, that *material nowadays is seen in much more dynamic terms*. Previously, material gain was often seen as the *outcome* of a successful strategy – if, for example, you carry out a minority attack successfully, you are rewarded by the win of the weak pawn. Today, material is often seen as *a factor in strategy* – an element that you can incorporate actively into your strategy. Modern top players are increasingly willing to trade material for other benefits. Obviously, this was also seen in earlier decades – one just needs to remember Tal's thrilling sacrifices for irresistible attacks or Petrosian's positional exchange sacrifices. However, these were still comparatively rare. Now the idea of sacrificing material for short-term or long-term gains is a standard tool in the arsenal of grandmasters and has helped shape the evaluation of many sharp positions. The present game is a case in point.

Aronian – Gustafsson

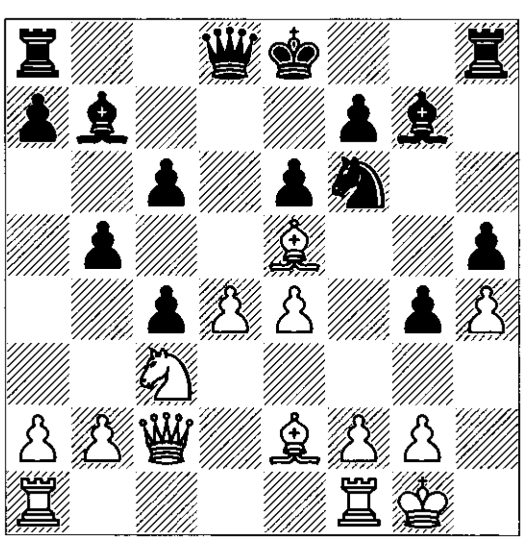
FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 c6 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗h4 dxc4 7 e4 g5 8 ♗g3 b5 9 ♘e5!?

This is another fashionable subvariation of the Anti-Moscow complex.

9...h5 10 h4 g4 11 ♗e2 ♗b7 12 0-0 ♘bd7 13 ♕c2 ♘xe5 14 ♗xe5 ♗g7 *(D)*

W



A key position in this branch of the Anti-Moscow. White has a strong centre and play against Black's exposed king, which will have a hard time finding a safe haven. However, Black has a pawn and perhaps more importantly, he can play to restrict White's light-squared bishop. In the crucial game Aronian-Anand from the World Championship tournament in Mexico City 2007, this strategy worked wonders. After 15 ♖ad1 0-0 16 ♗g3 ♘d7 17 f3 c5! 18 dxc5 ♕e7! 19 ♔h1 a6 20 a4 ♗c6 21 ♘d5?! exd5 22 exd5 ♗e5! 23 f4 ♗g7 24 dxc6 ♘xc5 Black was clearly better (see Chapter 2 for the whole game). Just look at the two impotent white bishops: one is restricted by its own pawns, and the other by the opponent's!

15 ♗g3!?

The latest fashion, giving up a second pawn to grab the initiative. The threat is e5 followed by ♘e4. The fact that White will now be two pawns down does not deter modern top players.

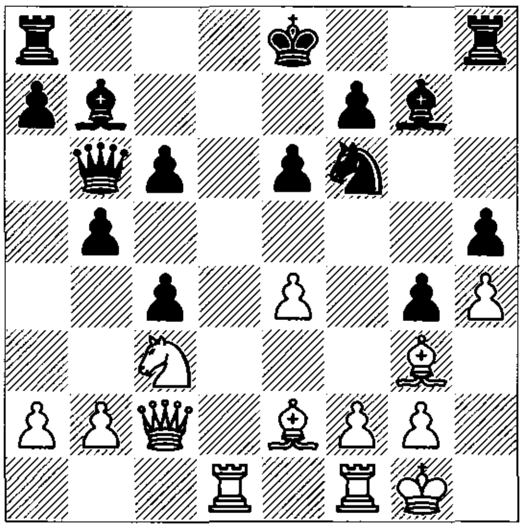
15...♕xd4 16 ♖ad1!?

A rare move in this position which, in combination with the following move, initiates a completely new approach, based on a profound understanding of the trade-off between material and initiative. Previously White used to play 16 ♖fd1 here, leaving the other rook on a1 to support a4. The high-level encounter Grishchuk-Svidler, World Ch, Mexico City 2007 eventually ended in a draw after immense complications: 16...♕c5 (16...♕b6 gave White strong pressure in Khalifman-Kobaliya, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2005, after 17 a4 a6 18 ♕d2 ♗h6 19 ♕d6 ♗f8 20 ♕e5 ♗e7 21 ♗f4 ♖g8 22 ♗g5) 17 ♗d6 ♕b6 (Black's idea is to lure the bishop to d6 rather than the white knight after e5 and ♘e4) 18 a4 a6 19 e5 ♘d7 20 a5 ♕a7 21 ♘e4 c5 22 ♘g5 ♘xe5 23 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 24 ♗xc4! bxc4 25 ♕a4+ ♔f8 26 ♖d7 ♗d5! 27 ♖d1! ♗d4 28 ♖xa7 (according to Svidler, postponing this capture one more move with 28 b3 may be more dangerous for Black, but who can resist taking the queen for so many moves?) 28...♖xa7, and Black managed to survive. Aronian's idea is different. He does not want to play a4 but has different objectives.

16...♕b6 *(D)*

As in Grishchuk-Svidler above, Black could contemplate 16...♕c5 instead. After 17 e5 ♘d5 18 ♘e4 ♕b6 19 ♘d6+ ♔f8 20 ♔h1 ♔g8 21 ♕e4 ♖f8 22 f3 ♗a8 23 fxg4 ♕e3! Black eventually managed to win in Wendt-Van Wely, Minneapolis 2005.

W



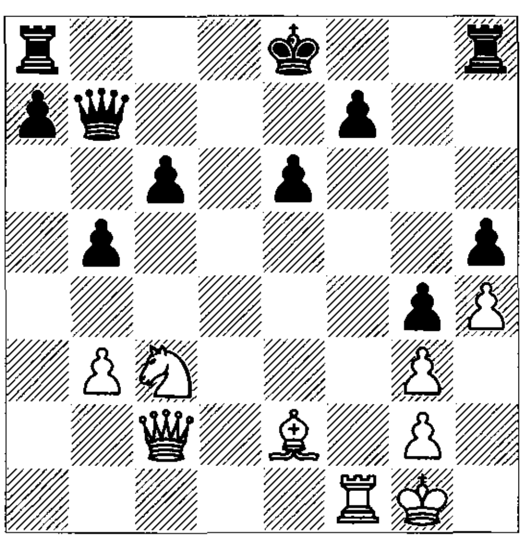
17 b3!

A completely novel approach to this position. Rather than throwing himself at Black, White plays 'positionally', seeking long-term compensation for his pawns. By allowing Black to undouble his pawns, White improves the mobility of his pieces, especially the scope of the light-squared bishop.

17...cxb3 18 axb3 a6

This looks slow but it is not easy to suggest a good alternative. Black can't really bring his king to safety, as 18...0-0?! is met by 19 e5 ♘d5 20 ♘e4 followed by 21 ♘g5 and 22 ♕h7+. After 18...♘d7 Gustafsson gives the line 19 e5! ♗xe5 (19...♘xe5 20 ♘e4 0-0?! 21 ♘g5 ♘g6 22 ♘xe6!) 20 ♖xd7! ♗xg3 21 ♖xb7 ♕xb7 (21...♗xf2+ 22 ♖xf2 ♕xb7 23 ♘e4) 22 fxg3 *(D)*.

B



Although Black is doing fine material-wise, he will never find a good spot for his king, whereas the white king can be safely tucked away at h2.

In *Schach*, Gustafsson explains White's basic strategy – a strategy which is very symptomatic for the new understanding of material in the Creative Concreteness era (my translation from German): "White does not need to rush. That is the new element in this position! That is not how people used to see it; everybody thought that White had to do something concrete – various stuff with ♕d2-g5 and so forth, but Black can withstand that."

19 ♖d2!

White quietly improves his position by doubling on the only open file on the board – just as Steinitz would have it!

19...c5 20 ♖d6 ♕a5?

According to Gustafsson's comments, this is a mistake, as the queen is sidelined on a5. He had to play 20...♗c6, after which it is still a game. Then Black could place the queen safely on b7, from where it covers d7 and eyes g2 in case White plays e5.

21 e5!

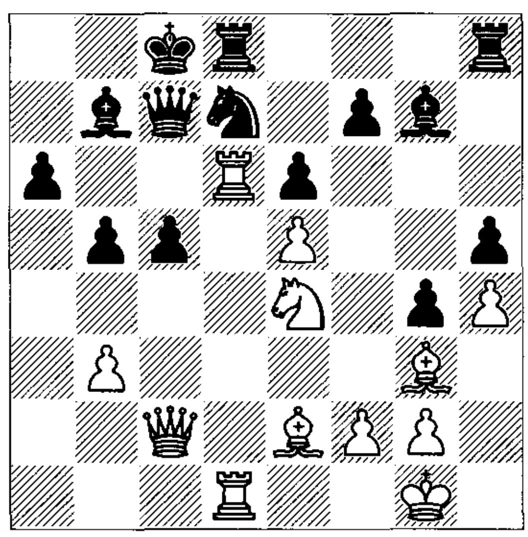
Following Black's mistake, White is ready to proceed to concrete action.

21...♘d7 22 ♖fd1 0-0-0

The king is not safe here, but 22...♘xe5 23 ♘e4 is not better – all White's pieces are enrolled in the attack.

23 ♘e4 ♕c7 *(D)*

W



24 ♘f6!

This nice tactical shot opens the h2-b8 diagonal for the dark-squared bishop.

24...♘xe5

This loses a piece, but 24...♗xf6 25 exf6 e5 26 ♕f5 ♗c6 27 f3 or 24...♘b6 25 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 26 ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 27 ♕d2+ followed by 28 ♕g5 (Gustafsson) also looks unpleasant. Still, I think that was the lesser evil.

25 ♗xe5 ♖xd6 26 ♖xd6 ♗xf6 27 ♗xf6 ♕xd6 28 ♗xh8 ♕d5 29 ♗f1 ♔c7 30 ♕c3

Black has three pawns for the piece but he is still lost. He succumbs on the dark squares.

30...♔b6 31 b4! c4 32 ♕a1 ♔c6 33 ♕f6 ♕d7 34 ♕h6 ♕d5 35 ♕f8 ♕f5 36 ♕e8+ ♔c7 37 ♕e7+ 1-0

As discussed above, I see Kasparov as the driving force of the new paradigm following his ascent in the 1980s and 1990s. Of contemporary top players, Veselin Topalov and to some extent Alexander Morozevich are probably the most obvious protagonists for this paradigm. Not that Kasparov, Topalov and Morozevich play exactly in the same style; Topalov and Morozevich are activists and take more risks than the pragmatic Kasparov used to do. However, especially Topalov's approach to the game is reminiscent of Kasparov's – the same diligent opening preparation, the explosive energy outlet during games and tournaments, and the willingness to look for new creative paths (this last part is Morozevich's special trademark). These characteristics led to what at the time of writing I would consider *the* most fantastic game of the 21st century so far (by the way, in my view the game Kasparov-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1999, was *the* game of the 20th century) – starting with a long-term sacrifice that would have made the Romantics happy.

Topalov – Kramnik
Wijk aan Zee 2008

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6

At the World Championship match between the two in Elista 2006, Kramnik consistently chose 4...dxc4 in this position. That must have been a disappointment for Topalov, given that the sacrifice on move 12 had been prepared by Topalov and his second Ivan Cheparinov in 2005. Now the time had finally come!

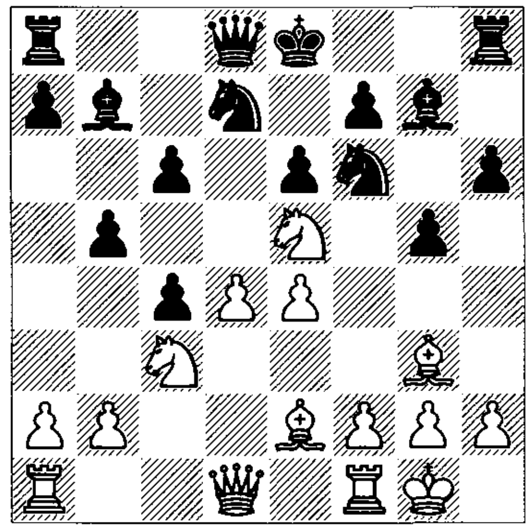
5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗h4 dxc4 7 e4 g5 8 ♗g3 b5 9 ♗e2 ♗b7 10 0-0 ♘bd7 11 ♘e5 ♗g7 *(D)*

We have already seen this position in several games above – but never the following fantastic move. White always automatically exchanged knights on d7.

12 ♘xf7!!

Whether or not this will eventually be refuted, it is a marvellous idea in the spirit of the Romantic Era – with a shot of Creative Concreteness. Rather than a direct mating attack, White is looking for a long-term initiative, just

W



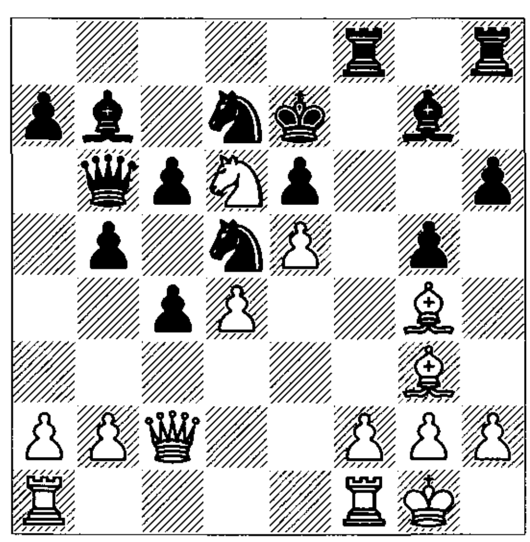
as with Aronian's 17 b3 in the previous game. Who cares if it costs a piece? Topalov later credited his second Cheparinov for finding and developing this novelty three years earlier, and the tandem later revealed that some of their analysis goes as deep as move 40!

12...♔xf7 13 e5

Formally, only this is a novelty. In two little-known Romanian correspondence games, the knight sacrifice had occurred, and in both games White followed up with 13 f4 here. Nacu-Brodda, corr. 2006, saw 13...b4 14 f5 exf5 15 ♗xc4+ ♔e7 16 ♖xf5 bxc3 17 bxc3 ♖f8 18 h4 with a strong initiative. The black player must have been impressed, since the following year he himself applied the line; in that game Black deviated with 13...♔g8 14 e5 ♘d5 15 ♘xd5 cxd5 16 ♗h5, and the game Brodda-Zidu, corr. 2007 was eventually drawn.

13...♘d5 14 ♘e4 ♔e7 15 ♘d6 ♕b6 16 ♗g4 ♖af8 17 ♕c2 *(D)*

B



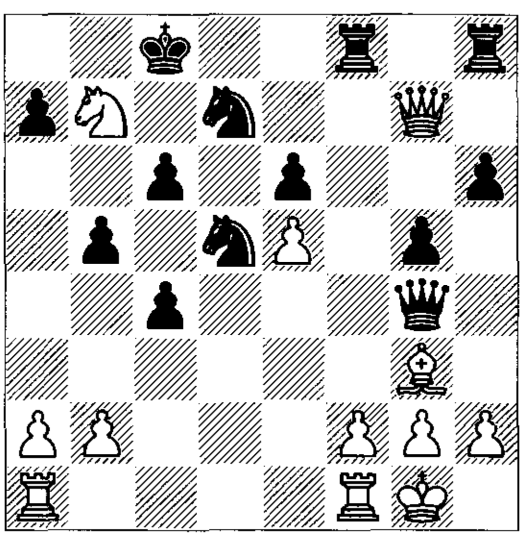
Following the sacrifice, both players have developed normally. We have seen this pattern before; following up on a sacrifice by calmly building up the pressure rather than rushing forward is a typical trait of contemporary top chess.

17...♕xd4?

In a higher sense, this may be the decisive mistake. In any case it is a psychological victory for White, who can now regain most of his sacrificed material while maintaining the initiative. Immediately after the game 17...♖hg8 was suggested as better, to counter White's threatened infiltration with his queen on g6. This was tested the very next day in the game Timman-Ljubojevic in the Wijk aan Zee Honorary Group! After 18 a4 ♗a8 19 ♖fe1 ♘c7 20 d5 cxd5 21 axb5 a5 22 b3 cxb3 23 ♕h7 d4 24 ♗h5 ♘xb5 25 ♘f7 b2 26 ♖ab1 ♘c3 27 ♘xh6 ♖h8 28 ♕xg7+ ♔d8 29 ♘f7+ ♔c7 30 ♘xh8 ♘xb1 31 ♘g6 (31 ♖xb1 ♕c6) 31...♖d8 32 h4 ♘d2 Black had repelled White's attack and was winning. However, this is unlikely to be the last word on the matter.

18 ♕g6! ♕xg4 19 ♕xg7+ ♔d8 20 ♘xb7+ ♔c8 *(D)*

W



21 a4!

White starts probing the queenside. Notice that White maintains his knight at b7 for the time being without interpolating the check on d6. There is no rush to do that since the king must guard the d7-knight. Mihail Marin has a very instructive remark about the b7-knight in his excellent comments at ChessBase.com. By keeping the knight at b7 for as long as possible, the knight's scope is increased. From b7 it directly covers crucial squares like c5 and d8, but it also indirectly – because the check can be given at any moment – covers all squares that can be reached from d6.

21...b4 22 ♖ac1

Here we see the knight's influence. White threatens 23 ♖xc4! ♕xc4 24 ♘d6+.

22...c3 23 bxc3 b3!?

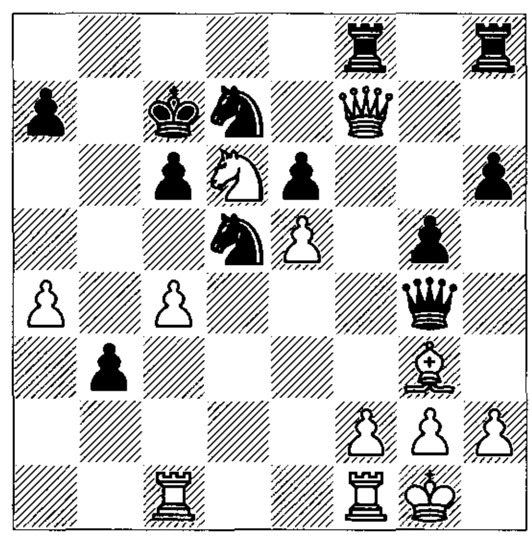
Kramnik tries to generate some counterplay with this passed pawn while at the same time keeping the queenside closed. However, now White has been given another battering-ram in the form of the c-pawn. After 23...♘xc3 Marin gives the brilliant tactical shot 24 h3! ♕d4 25 ♖fd1!! ♘xd1 26 ♘d6+ ♔d8 (26...♔c7? drops the queen after 27 ♘b5+, and 26...♔b8 27 ♕xd7 ♕b6 28 ♖xc6 doesn't help either) 27 ♖xc6, and White crashes through. That leaves 23...bxc3, which may be the best chance, although White's advantage is beyond doubt given the exposed black king.

24 c4!

As Kasparov has often said: "Pawns are also attacking pieces!"

24...♖fg8 25 ♘d6+ ♔c7 26 ♕f7 ♖f8 *(D)*

W



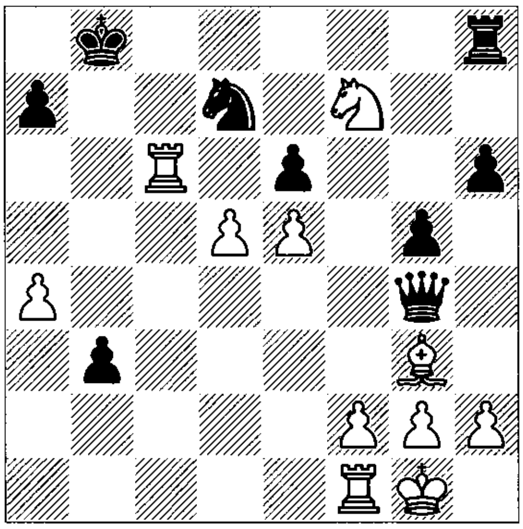
27 cxd5?!

Probably Topalov's only real inaccuracy in this game. The queen sacrifice looks tempting but in fact gives Black a hidden chance to save the game. Instead, White could win with 27 h3!. This move was suggested by Kasparov, who followed the game live on PlayChess.com. 'The world's strongest kibitzer', as they like to call him on that site, suggested that White should win after 27...♖xf7 28 hxg4 ♘f4 29 ♘xf7 ♘e2+ 30 ♔h2 ♘xc1 31 ♖xc1 ♖b8 despite Black's counterplay with the b-pawn. Subsequent analysis confirmed that Kasparov's intuitive evaluation of the position was correct. White does indeed win after 32 ♖b1 ♘c5 33 f4! ♘xa4 34 fxg5 hxg5 35 ♘xg5 b2 (35...♘c3 also does not help after 36 ♘xe6+ ♔c8 {the only square, as 36...♔d7? is met by 37 ♖xb3! ♖xb3 38 ♘c5+} 37 ♖f1! b2 38 ♘c5! b1♕ 39 ♖f8+ ♔c7 40 e6+ ♔b6 41 ♖xb8+ ♔xc5 42 ♖xb1 ♘xb1 43 e7) 36 ♘xe6+ ♔c8 (again the only

square, as 36...♔d7? allows the tactical shot 37 ♘c5+! ♘xc5 38 e6+, winning the rook) 37 g5! ♘c3 38 ♖xb2 ♖xb2 39 g6!, and the passed pawn decides the game.

27...♖xf7 28 ♖xc6+ ♔b8 29 ♘xf7 *(D)*

B



29...♖e8?

Kramnik played this quickly, but this move seals his fate. And precisely at this moment he had his best chance to escape! Again it was Kasparov who suggested the right alternative, the surprising 29...♕e2!. Kasparov's unique ability to find creative candidate moves has not vanished despite his retirement from competitive chess. The point is 30 ♘xh8 ♕xf1+! 31 ♔xf1 b2 32 ♖xe6 b1♕+, and White cannot escape perpetual check. If he wants to play for a win, White should refrain from taking the rook on h8, but the position after Marin's sample line 30 ♖c3 b2 31 ♖b3+ ♔a8 32 ♘xh8 ♘c5 33 ♖b5 ♘xa4 34 ♖xb2 ♕xb2 35 dxe6 ♕b6 36 e7 ♕e6 37 f4! gxf4 38 ♗h4 is double-edged.

30 ♘d6 ♖h8 31 ♖c4! ♕e2 32 dxe6 ♘b6 33 ♖b4

Now there is nothing double-edged about the position; White is just winning.

33...♔a8 34 e7

Not bad, but the simple 34 ♖xb3 looks easier. The text-move attempts to dislodge the black knight from the defence of the king.

34...♘d5 35 ♖xb3 ♘xe7 36 ♖fb1 ♘d5 37 h3 h5?!

This eases White's task as it jeopardizes the g5-pawn.

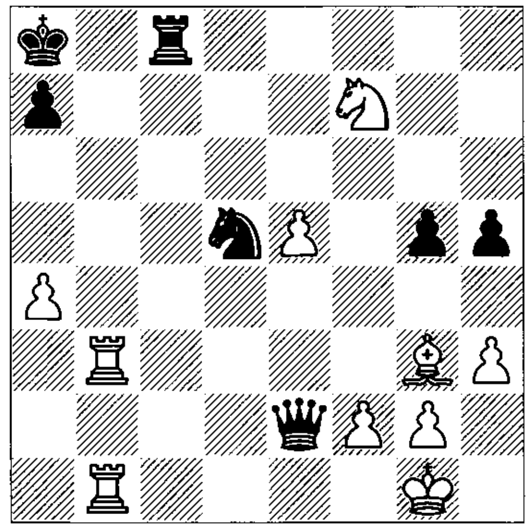
38 ♘f7 ♖c8 *(D)*

39 e6! a6

39...♕xe6 40 ♖b8+ mates.

40 ♘xg5 h4 41 ♗d6! ♖g8 42 ♖3b2 ♕d3 43 e7 ♘f6 44 ♗e5! ♘d7

W



After 44...♖xg5 White need not calculate 45 ♗xf6 ♖xg2+, since 45 ♖b8+ ♔a7 46 ♖1b7# is mate.

45 ♘e6 1-0

Black is defenceless against 46 ♘c7+ and 47 ♖b7# or vice versa.

A brilliant game. That is how top chess is played these days: detailed computer-aided home preparation followed by forceful creative play over the board. Looking back at my career, I cannot help wondering whether my natural reluctance towards the nitty-gritty work of finding novelties in the midst of complicated opening variations was one of the reasons why I never managed to break the 2600 Elo barrier (2586 being my highest). I guess we shall never know, as I have always preferred the conceptual over the detailed, and thus have never been inclined to drive opening theory forward. That I leave to others. In that respect I am more of a follower than a researcher, to use the distinction made decades ago by Botvinnik. Only once in my career did I (intentionally) prepare a novelty with analysis running to move 30.

L.B. Hansen – Ribli
Polanica Zdroj 1993

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♘f3 ♘bd7 6 ♗d3 dxc4

The Meran Variation of the Semi-Slav Defence, which I have played extensively with both colours.

7 ♗xc4 b5 8 ♗d3 ♗b7

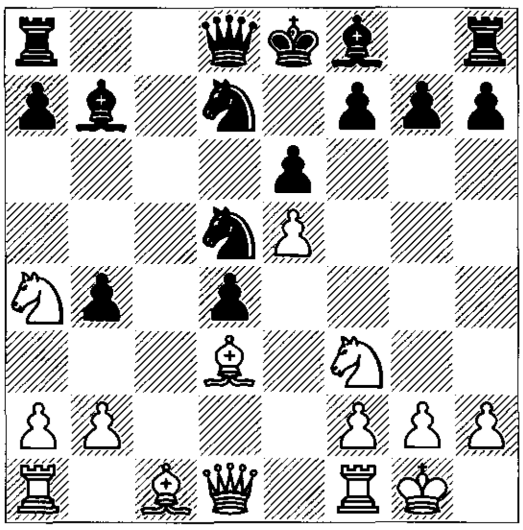
The Wade-Larsen Variation, invented by Bob Wade around 1950 and popularized by Bent Larsen in the 1960s. It has remained a popular and reliable choice ever since. As Black, I

myself prefer an even older variation, Lundin's 8...b4.

9 e4 b4 10 ♘a4 c5 11 e5 ♘d5 12 0-0 cxd4 *(D)*

This is the main move, but 12...h6 is an interesting alternative for Black.

W



We have reached one of the critical positions in the Wade-Larsen Variation.

13 ♖e1

In the 1980s, the pawn sacrifice 13 ♘xd4 ♘xe5 14 ♗b5+ ♘d7 was extensively tested, but Black seems to hold his own. I therefore preferred the older move which is in accordance with Nimzowitsch's teachings: White overprotects the pawn on e5.

13...g6!

Bent Larsen's move, introduced into practice in the fifth game of his Candidates match against Portisch in Poreč 1968. The move has a sound strategic basis. Black develops his bishop to g7 to put pressure on White's e5-pawn and at the same time circumvents White's idea of building a kingside attack by ♘xd4 followed by ♕g4 or ♕h5. The drawback is a slight weakening of the dark squares.

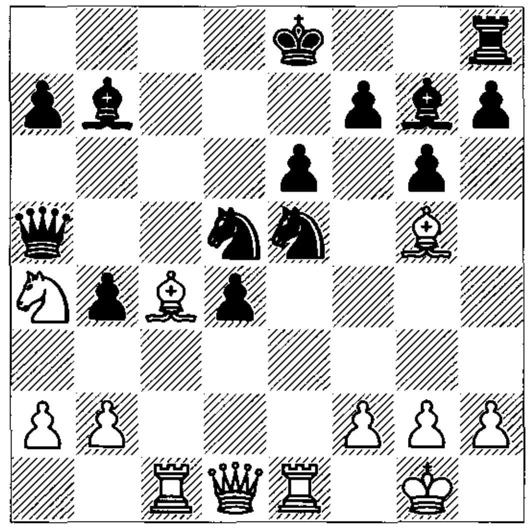
14 ♗g5 ♕a5 15 ♘d2!?

A rare alternative to the more common 15 ♘xd4. White threatens to harass Black's queen by 16 ♘c4.

15...♗a6

The natural reaction. However, following this game, the whole line, which had been out of practice for several years, gained a new breath of life, and it has been played by Meran experts like Dreev and Yusupov. The current verdict of theory is that White maintains a tiny edge in the upcoming complications. Therefore Black has looked for alternatives and an interesting one is 15...♖c8!? 16 ♘c4 ♖xc4! 17 ♗xc4 ♗g7 18 ♖c1 ♘xe5 *(D)*.

W



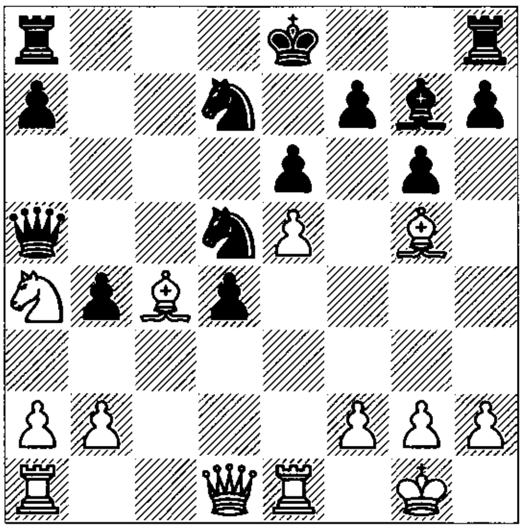
By sacrificing an exchange, Black alters the course of the game. He has two pawns for the exchange and a sound position, but still needs to bring his king into safety. I faced this position as White against Palac at the European Team Championship, Khersonisos 2007. I did not remember the details of my 15-year-old analysis of this variation but I seemed to remember a tactical shot by ♘c5... After some thought I played 19 ♘c5?! here, and the move apparently had a shock effect, as Palac blundered by 19...♕xc5 20 ♗a6 ♘c3?? 21 ♗xb7 1-0, as White is winning after 21...♘xd1 22 ♖xc5 ♘xb2 23 ♖exe5 ♗xe5 24 ♖xe5; the two powerful bishops quickly annihilate Black's pawns. However, my intended combination is flawed. My point was 20...♕b6 (instead of 20...♘c3??) 21 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 22 ♕a4+ ♘d7 23 ♕xa7 '! and wins', I thought, as 23...♕xa7 24 ♖c8# is mate. However, as any computer program will tell you in a second, 23...♕b8! wins for Black! White can improve by 23 ♕b5! instead of 23 ♕xa7, but after 23...♘5b6 24 ♕xb4 ♘f6 25 ♕xd4 ♘bd5 Black is better. The diagrammed position remains the critical one in this line, and White has not yet been able to find a path to an advantage. Magnus Carlsen unsuccessfully tried 19 ♖xe5?! against Kariakin in a blindfold game in Bilbao 2007, while Mamedyarov's 19 ♗f1 against Gelfand from Moscow 2007 also does not shake Black's fortress.

16 ♘c4 ♗xc4 17 ♗xc4 ♗g7 *(D)*

18 ♕xd4!

This piece sacrifice is the point of White's play. It was first played in the game Rashkovsky-Sveshnikov, Sochi 1979, but since the

W



consensus was that it only leads to a draw, it was not repeated until this game. The following sequence is rather forced.

18...♕xa4 19 ♗xd5 exd5 20 ♕xd5 ♘b6

Black cannot evacuate his king from the centre, as 20...0-0 fails to 21 b3.

21 ♕d6 ♕d7 22 ♕xb4 ♗f8!

In the original game Sveshnikov continued 22...♘d5?!, but after 23 ♕e4 h6 24 ♗f6 0-0 25 ♖ad1 ♗xf6 26 ♖xd5 ♕b7 27 exf6 ♕xb2 28 ♕f4 White maintained some advantage, although the game was drawn shortly afterwards. The text-move was the rejoinder recommended in the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings* (ECO), which was the primary source of opening knowledge at the time.

23 ♕c3

In recent years 23 ♕h4!? has been tested; the original game was Dreev-Harikrishna, FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2005, in which White emerged from the complications with an extra pawn after 23...♗g7 24 ♖ad1 ♕a4 25 ♖d4! ♕xa2 26 ♗e7! ♕e6 27 ♗b4 ♗f8 28 ♕f6 ♖g8 29 ♖d6 ♕f5! 30 ♖xb6 ♕xf6 (30...axb6? 31 ♕c6+) 31 exf6+ ♔d7 32 ♖a1 ♔c7 33 ♖b5 ♔c6 34 ♖aa5 ♖d8 35 ♗e1 ♖d1 36 ♔f1 ♗d6 37 ♔e2 ♖c1 38 ♗c3, although later Black managed to draw. I would not be surprised if Dreev had prepared all this at home.

23...♕c8! 24 ♕f3 ♗g7 *(D)*

25 e6!?

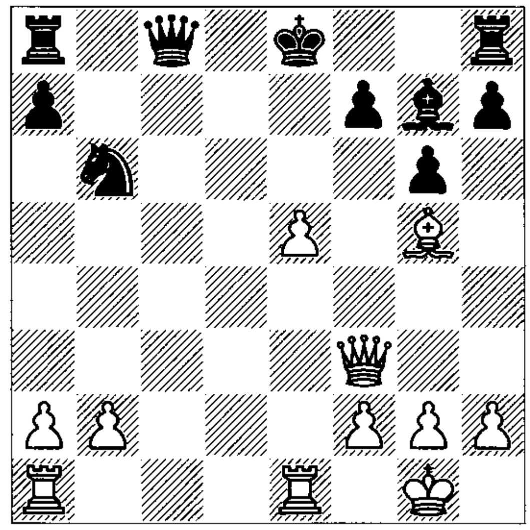
This was my prepared novelty! Before that, *ECO* suggested that White's best was 25 ♕a3 ♗f8 26 ♕f3 ♗g7 27 ♕a3 with a draw by repetition.

25...0-0 26 ♗e7!

The point of the previous move.

26...fxe6 27 ♗xf8 ♕xf8 28 ♕b3 ♕f7! 29 ♖xe6 ♗xb2! 30 ♖d1

W



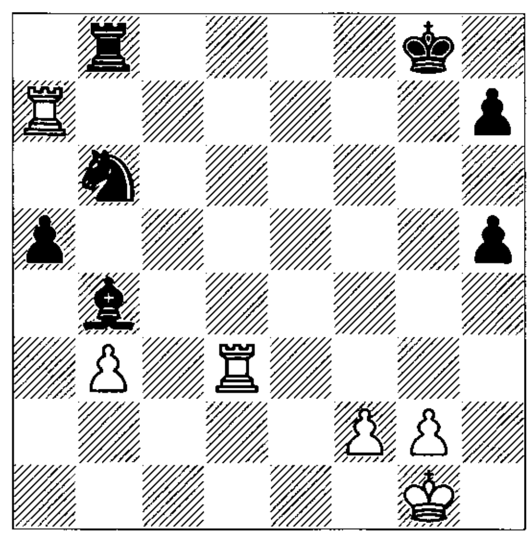
My home analysis ended here, concluding that White is slightly better. However, Ribli defends well, and a draw should be the most likely result.

30...♖b8!

A good prophylactic move. White threatened 31 ♖xb6 axb6 32 ♕xb2 ♖xa2 33 ♕xb6 with decent winning chances due to Black's exposed king.

31 ♖e7 ♕xb3 32 axb3 a5 33 ♖a7 ♗c3 34 h4! ♗b4 35 h5! gxh5 36 ♖d3 *(D)*

B



36...h4?

A crucial mistake just before the time-control. This is a typical scenario when faced with a novelty – the first reaction is correct but costs time and energy, and only later the defender slips up. 36...♔h8! 37 ♖h3 ♘d5! 38 ♖xh5 ♘f6 should draw.

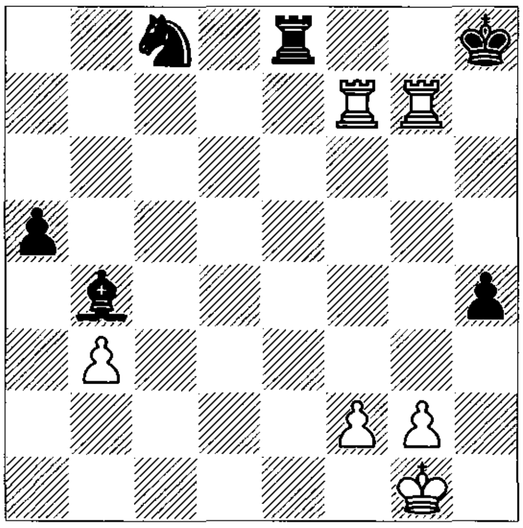
37 ♖d4 ♖e8 38 ♖g4+ ♔h8 39 ♖gg7!

Of course! According to Nimzowitsch's terminology, this is an example of the 'seventh rank absolute'.

39...♘c8 40 ♖xh7+ ♔g8 41 ♖ag7+ ♔f8 42 ♖f7+ ♔g8 43 ♖hg7+ ♔h8 *(D)*

44 ♖g4! ♘d6 45 ♖ff4 ♔h7 46 ♖xh4+ ♔g6 47 ♖hg4+ ♔h5 48 ♖h4+ ♔g6 49 ♖hg4+ ♔h5

W



50 ♔h2 ♗d2 51 ♖h4+ ♔g5 52 ♖hg4+ ♔h5 53 ♖h4+ ♔g5 54 ♖fg4+ ♔f5 55 ♖d4 ♗c3 56 ♖d3

Obviously not 56 ♖xd6? ♗e5+.

56...♗e5+ 57 g3 ♘f7 58 ♖d5 ♖b8 59 ♖xa5 ♖xb3 60 f4 ♖b2+ 61 ♔h3 ♔g6

The last trap.

62 ♖g4+!

62 fxe5?? ♘g5+ 63 ♔g4 ♖b4# would be embarrassing.

62...♔h6 63 ♖a7! 1-0

Whereas Kasparov and Topalov emphasize the 'concrete' in Creative Concreteness – especially in opening preparation – other players emphasize the 'creative' in taking chess down new avenues. Perhaps the most creative player in today's top ten is Alexander Morozevich, who constantly comes up with amazing ideas at the board.

Morozevich – Ponomariov
Moscow 2008

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♕c2

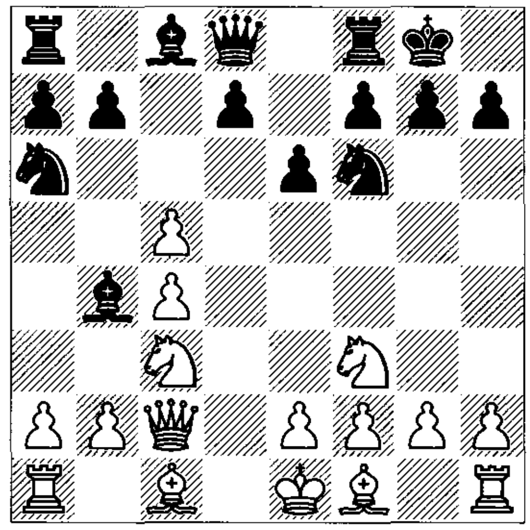
This, the Classical Variation, was a popular response to the Nimzo-Indian in the 1930s. During the past two decades it has once again gained popularity and has superseded Rubinstein's 4 e3 as White's main weapon against this opening. Thus the variation has been extensively analysed over several decades – but still Morozevich manages to cook up something new as early as move 7!

4...0-0

Against the other main line, 4...d5, Morozevich has demonstrated that he also has creative ideas. Morozevich-Akopian, European Team Ch, Khersonisos 2007 proceeded 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 ♕xc3 c5 7 dxc5 d4 8 ♕g3 0-0 9 ♗h6 ♘e8 10 h4!? ♘d7 11 h5 ♕c7 12 ♖h3! f5 13 ♕xc7 ♘xc7 14 ♗g5 e5 15 ♗e7 ♖e8 16 ♗d6 ♘e6 17 ♖d1 ♘exc5 18 f4!, with some advantage for White, who went on to win.

5 ♘f3 c5 6 dxc5 ♘a6 *(D)*

W



7 c6!?

There it is, Morozevich's inventive novelty! The main line is 7 a3, while 7 g3, 7 ♗f4, 7 ♗g5 and 7 ♗d2 have also been played. However, no one had thought of the text-move before, and at first sight it does look paradoxical. White spends a tempo letting Black strengthen his centre. It is scarcely a 'computer move'; at least my computer (Shredder) doesn't really like the move. However, it is creative and novel and leads to interesting and non-standard play, which is undoubtedly what Morozevich wanted. He thrives in such complex positions. In a recent interview Anand described Morozevich's play as follows: "His way of playing is something special ... He plays very creatively and extremely aggressively. He tries to disturb the balance on the board no matter what it takes. This exerts an enormous pressure on his opponents. This style is very difficult to emulate. In his way to play chess, Morozevich is unique." When asked about the risk that such a creative style of play entails, the Indian replied: "I believe he does not think that he takes a lot of risk. The positions are very unusual for us but not unusual for him. In hair-raising complications he feels as much at home as Ulf Andersson in an equal endgame. His way to understand chess is clearly different from most other top players." What a rich and inexhaustible game chess is!

7...dxc6?!

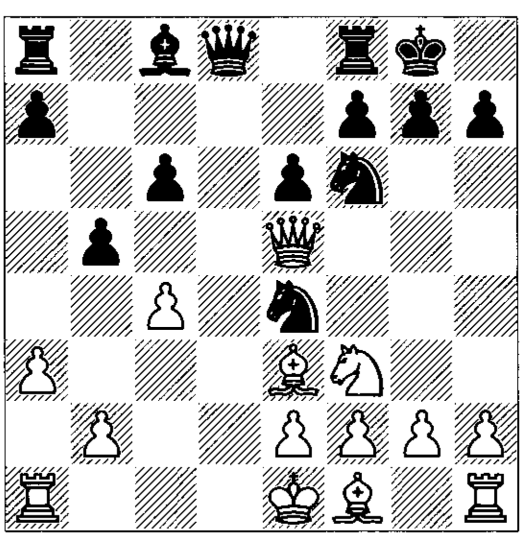
Faced with an unexpected novelty, Ponomariov prefers to avoid the most natural move,

taking towards the centre with 7...bxc6. This was tested in three games from the strong Tal Memorial Blitz tournament that followed this tournament. In the round 5 game Carlsen-Leko, Black equalized after 8 a3 ♗xc3+ 9 ♕xc3 d5 10 b4 ♘e4 11 ♕c2 c5 12 b5 ♘c7 13 e3 a6 14 a4 ♘e8! 15 ♗d3 ♘8d6. A few rounds later, Morozevich himself tried 10 e3 (instead of 10 b4) against Leko, and after 10...♘c5 11 ♕c2 ♘ce4 12 ♗e2 a5 13 b3 ♕b6 14 0-0 ♖b8 15 ♖b1 ♗a6 16 ♘e5 c5 17 f3 ♘d6 18 ♗d2 a complicated position arose that was later drawn. Finally, the following day Ex-World Champion Karpov tried 9...♘c5 (instead of 9...d5) against Morozevich, but the latter went on to win after 10 ♕c2 a5 11 ♗e3 ♕e7 12 g3 a4 13 ♗g2 ♗a6 14 ♘e5 ♖fc8 15 ♖d1 d5 16 0-0, although at this point the position was merely unclear. Really hard-nosed players might want to try out the pawn sacrifice 7...d5!? 8 cxb7 (perhaps White should refrain from this) 8...♗xb7, when White's underdeveloped kingside gives Black ample compensation.

8 a3 ♗xc3+ 9 ♕xc3 ♘c5 10 ♗e3 ♘ce4 11 ♕e5! b5? *(D)*

The 2002 FIDE World Champion misses White's subtle threat. 11...♕e7 was necessary, although here too 12 g4! ♘d6 13 ♗c5 ♖d8 14 ♖d1 ♘fe8 15 ♗g2 leads to some advantage for White.

W



12 g4!

And just like that, it is game over – there is no way to meet the threat of g5 and Black loses a piece for insufficient compensation.

12...c5

Hoping to stir up trouble since 12...♘d6? just loses to 13 ♖d1.

13 g5! ♕a5+ 14 b4! cxb4 15 gxf6 ♗b7

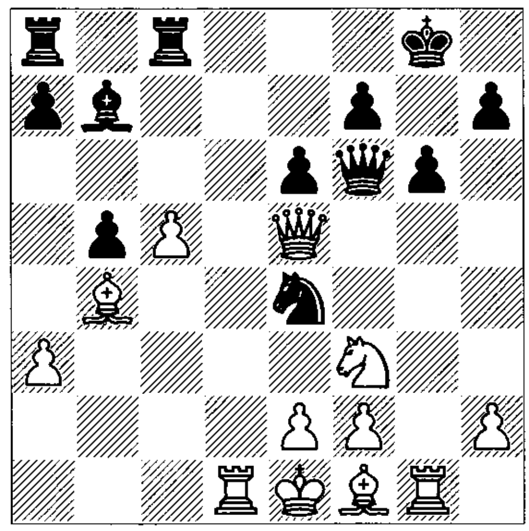
Or 15...bxa3+ 16 ♗d2 ♘xd2 17 ♘xd2 g6 (17...♖d8 loses to 18 ♕g5 g6 19 ♕h6) 18 ♗g2 with an easy win for White.

16 ♗d2 ♖fc8

This is rather hopeless, but 16...♘xd2 17 ♘xd2 g6 (17...♗xh1? 18 ♕g5 g6 19 ♕h6 mates) 18 axb4 ♕xb4 19 ♖b1 ♕a3 20 ♖g1 is not much better.

17 ♗xb4 ♕b6 18 c5 ♕d8 19 ♖g1 g6 20 ♖d1 ♕xf6 *(D)*

W



21 c6!

White has several ways to win, but this nice shot secures a technically winning ending.

21...♗xc6 22 ♖g4!

The point of the previous move. Because of the threat of 23 ♖xe4, Black cannot avoid the exchange of queens, and to boot he has to part with his light-squared bishop.

22...♕xe5 23 ♘xe5 f5 24 ♘xc6! ♖xc6 25 ♗g2! a5 26 ♗xe4 fxe4 27 ♗d2

Now the win is trivial – Black's pawns are simply too weak, and his king is also vulnerable.

27...♖c4 28 ♖g5! ♖a4 29 ♖xb5 ♖xa3 30 ♖b7! a4 31 ♗f4 ♖b3

White was threatening to weave a mating-net by 32 ♖dd7.

32 ♖xb3 axb3 33 ♖b1 e3

Otherwise the b-pawn just goes.

34 ♗xe3 ♖b8 35 ♔d2 ♖b4 36 f3!

Parrying 36...♖h4, which is now simply met by 37 ♗g1.

36...e5 37 ♗f2! 1-0

Let us conclude this chapter with a look at two historically important games, which emphasize the role of Creative Concreteness at the highest level. In terms of style the Kramnik-Anand rivalry can be seen as a sequel to the

Karpov-Kasparov rivalry of the 1980s and early 1990s. While certainly not identical in style to their great predecessors – to paraphrase Kasparov – there are distinct similarities. Kramnik's prophylactic and conceptual style is reminiscent of Karpov's, while Anand excels in the dynamic and contextual style of Kasparov. Before the World Championship match in Bonn between Kramnik and Anand, Kramnik stated that this match was going to determine who in the light of history would be seen as the best player of their generation – Anand or himself. By brilliant *creative as well as concrete* strokes in both preparation and over the board, Anand settled this question.

Kramnik – Anand
World Ch match (game 3), Bonn 2008

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3

The Exchange Variation led Kramnik nowhere in game 1 after 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 cxd5 cxd5 5 ♗f4 ♘c6 6 e3 ♗f5 7 ♘f3 e6 8 ♕b3 ♗b4 9 ♗b5 0-0 10 ♗xc6 ♗xc3+ 11 ♕xc3 ♖c8 12 ♘e5 ♘g4! 13 ♘xg4 ♗xg4 14 ♕b4 ♖xc6 15 ♕xb7 ♕c8! 16 ♕xc8 ♖fxc8 17 0-0 a5!, and White's extra pawn was insignificant given the opposite-coloured bishops and Black's possession of the open c-file. The game was drawn on move 32. It was clear that Kramnik needed something sharper to obtain a pull as White – but sharper also means riskier.

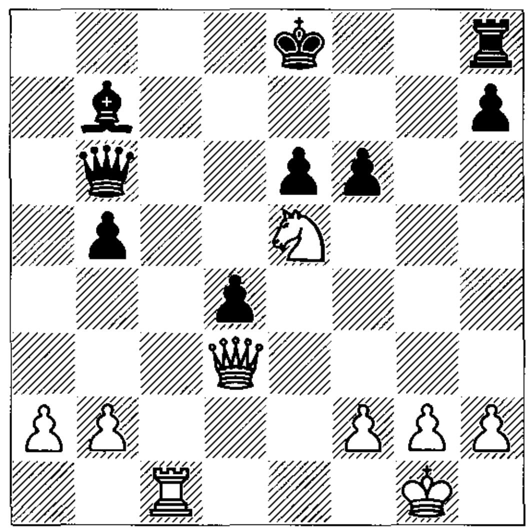
3...♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 e3 ♘bd7 6 ♗d3 dxc4 7 ♗xc4 b5 8 ♗d3 a6

This is how Rubinstein played in the first game of this variation's life, against Grünfeld in Merano 1924. It is because of the venue of this game that the variation with 6...dxc4 got to be known as the Meran Variation. Later, Black started also trying Lundin's 8...b4 (my own favourite move in this position) and especially the Wade-Larsen Variation 8...♗b7. In recent years Zviagintsev's 8...♗d6 has enjoyed a certain amount of popularity. However, it is unlikely that 8...a6 was a big surprise for Kramnik, as this move has always been a main line and had recently been played by Kasimdzhanov and Nielsen, both seconds of Anand during the match. However, it soon transpired that the Anand team had delved much deeper into the intricacies of the position, and even more importantly, the resulting positions suit Anand's style much better than Kramnik's. A brilliant piece of preparation, psychologically as well as chess-wise.

9 e4 c5 10 e5 cxd4 11 ♘xb5 axb5 12 exf6 gxf6

Studying Botvinnik's games as a teenager, I was very impressed by Botvinnik-Euwe, World Ch, The Hague/Moscow 1948: 12...♕b6?! 13 fxg7 ♗xg7 14 0-0 ♘c5 15 ♗f4 ♗b7 16 ♖e1 ♖d8 17 ♖c1 ♖d5 18 ♗e5! ♗xe5 19 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 20 ♘xe5 ♘xd3 21 ♕xd3 f6 *(D)*.

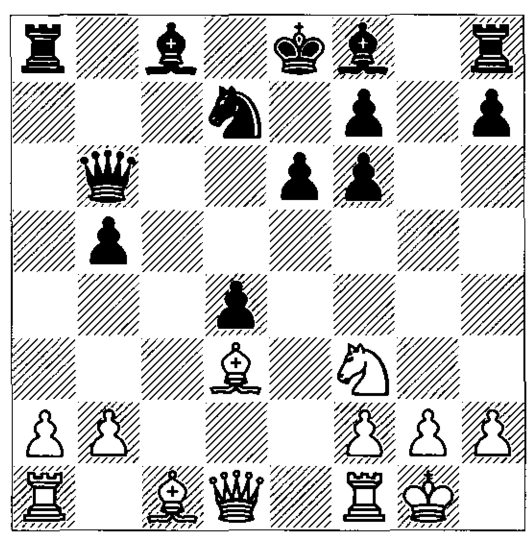
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22 ♕g3! fxe5 23 ♕g7 ♖f8 24 ♖c7 ♕xc7 25 ♕xc7 ♗d5 26 ♕xe5 d3 27 ♕e3 ♗c4 28 b3, and White went on to win.

13 0-0 ♕b6 *(D)*

W



14 ♕e2!

This is certainly White's most critical move. 14 ♗e4 ♗b7 15 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 16 ♘xd4 ♖g8 offered Black good counterplay in Kamsky-Kramnik(!), Linares 1994, although the game later ended in a draw. It is interesting to speculate what Kramnik himself had intended to play, had Kamsky chosen 14 ♕e2 – 14...b4 and 14...♗a6 are both known to lead to somewhat difficult positions for Black, although top players like

Shirov, Bareev and Kariakin have managed to hold their own with the latter move.

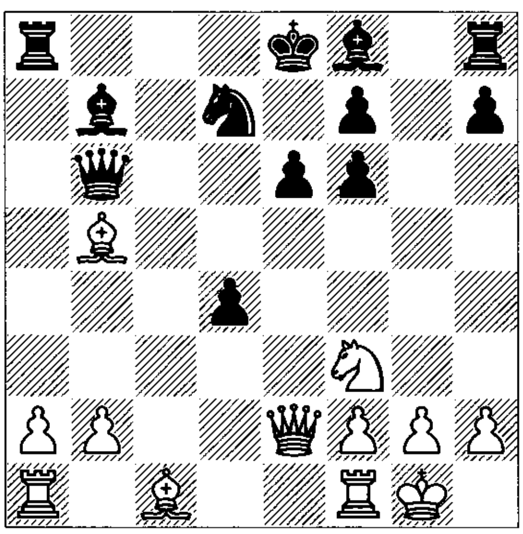
14...♗b7!

There it is, Anand's novelty! Or rather, it is not really a novelty, since it had also been played in a few games between lower-rated players, and it is also not entirely clear who was the originator of the idea in Anand's camp, Kasimdzhanov or Anand himself. The story goes that Anand and 'Kasim' arrived at the first joint preparation session of the team, and both claimed to have a powerful idea in the Meran – and then it turned out to be the same... In any case, if one move has ever decided the outcome of an entire world championship match, this is the one.

15 ♗xb5! *(D)*

Again the most critical. Backing off with, e.g., 15 ♗e4 is possible but a psychological concession.

B



15...♗d6!?

For the alternative 15...♖g8, see game 5 below.

16 ♖d1

These days, top players analyse opening variations to the end – no stopping with assessments such as 'unclear' or 'interesting', as might have been the case in former times. Readers that are familiar with my earlier book *Foundations of Chess Strategy* might recall my comments to the famous game Fischer-Unzicker, Zurich 1959. In that game – a main-line Ruy Lopez – Fischer employed a pawn sacrifice that he had successfully used in an earlier game against Shocron (Mar del Plata 1959). The pawn sacrifice was 'interesting' and netted Fischer two fine wins, but it would not take a modern grandmaster equipped with a powerful analysis engine many hours to show that Black has a clear and more or less forced path to a draw. Chess has changed since Fischer's times! This transition was initiated by Kasparov – known for his thoroughness in analysis – and aided by the emergence of supporting computer programs. This position is another example of how diligent preparation is an inherent part of contemporary top chess, and that sometimes sharp positions peter out in (prepared) draws. After 16 ♘xd4!? ♕xd4 (better than 16...♖g8?, as played in Döppner-Voigt, Germany (team event) 1992/3, when 17 g3! gives White a clear advantage) 17 ♖d1 ♗xh2+! 18 ♔xh2 ♕h4+ 19 ♔g1 ♗xg2! (Lasker's famous double bishop sacrifice, known since the classic game Lasker-Bauer, Amsterdam 1889 – however, here it only leads to a draw) 20 ♗xd7+ ♔e7 21 ♔xg2 ♖hg8+ 22 ♔f3 ♕h5+ 23 ♔e3 ♕c5+ 24 ♔d2 ♖ad8! 25 ♖f1 ♖xd7+ 26 ♔e1 ♖c8! 27 ♕e3 ♕a5+ 28 ♗d2 ♖xd2 29 ♕xd2 ♕e5+ 30 ♕e2 ♕a5+, the game could have ended in an exciting draw by perpetual with Anand still being 'in book' – the drawing line was indicated by his second Peter Heine Nielsen in subsequent notes to the game.

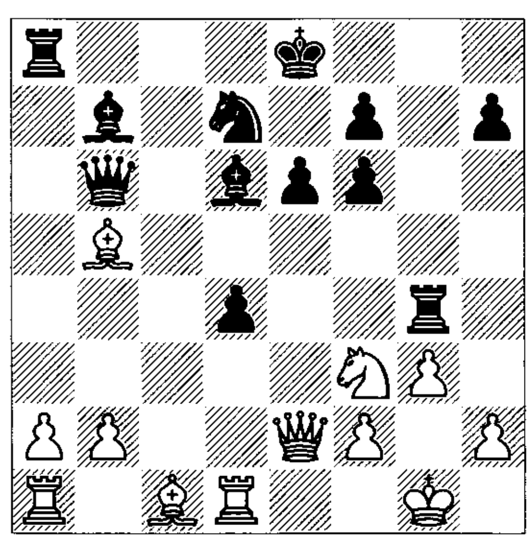
16...♖g8 17 g3!

Despite being caught off-guard, Kramnik initially plays well. The text-move prophylactically takes the sting out of Black's threats along the g-file.

17...♖g4! *(D)*

Formally speaking, only this is the genuine novelty. A game D'Israel-Gerbelli, Americana 2000, published in *Informator 79*, proceeded 17...♗c5?! 18 b4!, and White took over the initiative.

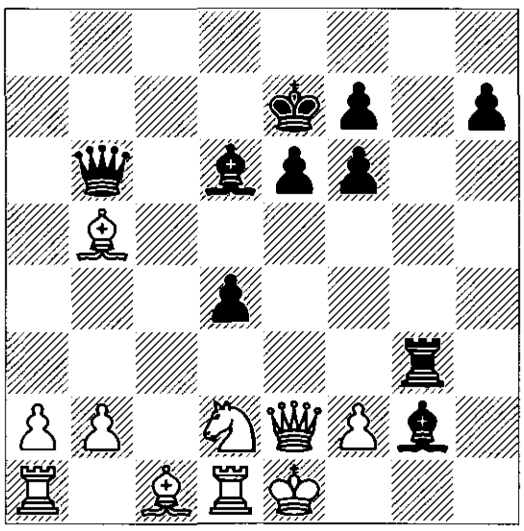
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18 ♗f4!

An astonishing counter! In *Informator*, the natural 18 ♘d2 was recommended here, but as shown by Peter Heine Nielsen in his notes in *New In Chess*, here too Black can force a draw – in fact in more than one way. The main line goes 18...♔e7! 19 ♗xd7 (19 ♕xg4?! ♕xb5 leaves White vulnerable on the light squares) 19...♖ag8! 20 ♗b5 ♖xg3+! (20...d3!? 21 ♕xd3 ♖xg3+ 22 hxg3 ♖xg3+ 23 ♔f1 ♖xd3 24 ♗xd3 ♕d4! 25 ♘c4 ♗b4 26 a3 ♗g2+! 27 ♔xg2 ♕g4+ also leads to a perpetual) 21 hxg3 (not 21 fxg3? d3+ 22 ♕f2 ♗c5) 21...♖xg3+ 22 ♔f1!? ♗g2+ 23 ♔e1 *(D)*.

B



23...♖e3! 24 fxe3 ♗g3+ 25 ♕f2 ♗xf2+ 26 ♔xf2 dxe3+ 27 ♔xg2 ♕xb5 with a draw.

18...♗xf4 19 ♘xd4!?

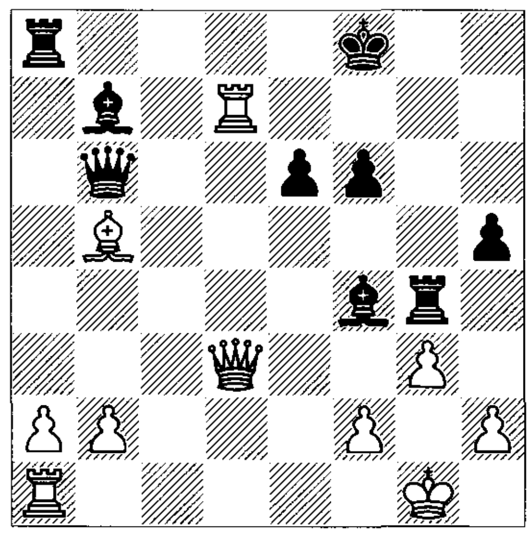
Kramnik's surprising idea. White temporarily sacrifices a piece to take over the initiative. However, the natural 19 ♖xd4 is most likely better. It is striking that in his notes Anand's second, Peter Heine Nielsen – who usually supports all verdicts with lengthy variations – simply comments that "the computer immediately insists that 19 ♖xd4 is just better for White. Hopefully it's not that simple." Either White really has something here, which may be the reason that Anand chose to deviate with 15...♖g8 in game 5, or the Anand camp has some bomb ready which they prefer to keep secret. In *Schach*, the German grandmaster Jan Gustafsson, a close friend of Nielsen and a strong theorist himself, gives the lines 19...0-0-0 20 ♖ad1 ♗d5 21 ♗c4 ♗c6 22 ♖xf4 ♖xf4 23 gxf4 ♖g8+ 24 ♔f1 and 19...♔f8 20 ♖xf4 ♖xf4 21 gxf4 ♔e7 22 a4 ♕c5, in both cases with an edge for White according to the analysis engines. However, to the human eye White's vulnerable king gives rise for concern, and it is understandable that Kramnik instead preferred to strive for the initiative. However, objectively it doesn't offer White more than a draw at best.

19...h5

19...♖g6 was a worthy alternative, when 20 ♗xd7+?! ♔xd7 21 ♘xe6+ ♗d6! 22 ♘f4 ♖g5 is better for White, while 20 ♘xe6 fxe6 21 ♖xd7 ♔f8 22 ♗d3 ♗e5 23 ♗xg6 hxg6 24 ♕c4 ♔e8 25 ♖h7 ♗d4! 26 ♖xb7 ♗xf2+ 27 ♔f1 ♕xb7 28 ♕xe6+ ♔f8 29 ♕xf6+ ♔g8 30 ♕xg6+ ♔h8 leaves White with nothing better than a draw (Nielsen). However, the cool computer move 20 a4! seems promising for White; Gustafsson gives the line 20...♗d5 21 ♘xe6 ♗xe6 22 ♗xd7+ ♔e7 23 ♗xe6 fxe6 24 ♕e4 ♕b8 25 ♖d4 with a strong initiative for White.

20 ♘xe6! fxe6 21 ♖xd7 ♔f8 22 ♕d3 *(D)*

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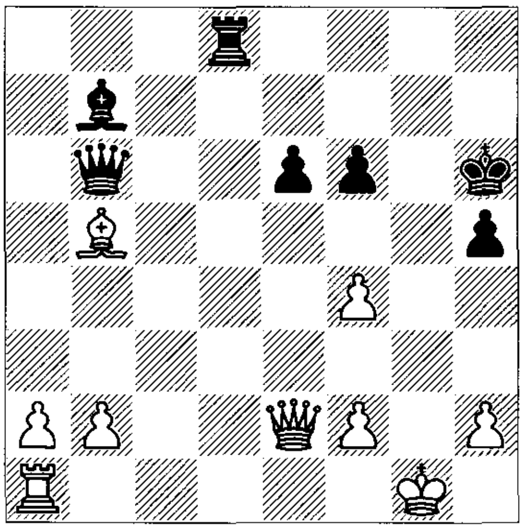


An important moment of the game – and indeed the match. With 22...♗xg3!? 23 hxg3 h4! 24 ♖d6 (not 24 ♔f1? hxg3 25 fxg3 ♖g5!, and Black wins) 24...♕c5 25 b4 ♕e5 26 ♖d8+ ♖xd8 27 ♕xd8+ ♔g7 28 ♕e7+ ♔h6 29 ♕f8+ ♖g7 30 ♕h8+ ♖h7 Anand could have forced a draw, as White has nothing better than the repetition with 31 ♕f8+. However, Anand decided to play for a win by entering a position two pawns down! A courageous decision, and if it had failed, the match may very well have had a different outcome. This, however, is one of Anand's major strengths – intuitively evaluating such sharp positions. As I discussed in *Foundations of Chess Strategy*, this is a typical characteristic of an activist, one of the four types of chess-players that I divide players into.

22...♖g7! 23 ♖xg7 ♔xg7 24 gxf4 ♖d8 25 ♕e2 ♔h6! *(D)*

This was the position that Anand was aiming for. Black's king has found a relatively safe

W



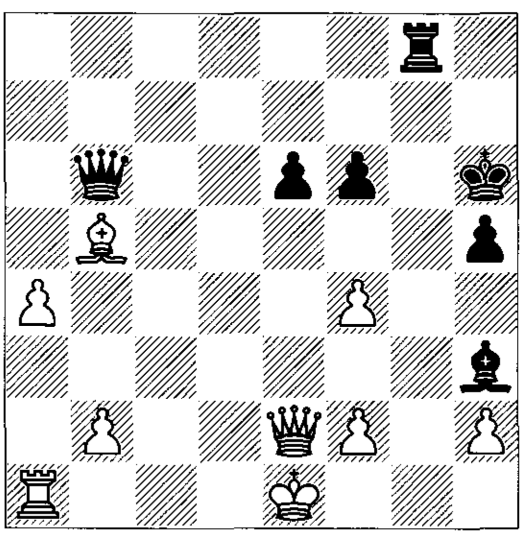
haven on h6, while his white counterpart is now feeling the heat. Still, the two extra pawns on the queenside should not be underestimated, and Black needs to proceed accurately and forcefully. The margin for error is small for both sides.

26 ♔f1 ♖g8 27 a4

Kramnik defends the bishop while preparing to evacuate the king.

27...♗g2+ 28 ♔e1 ♗h3! *(D)*

W



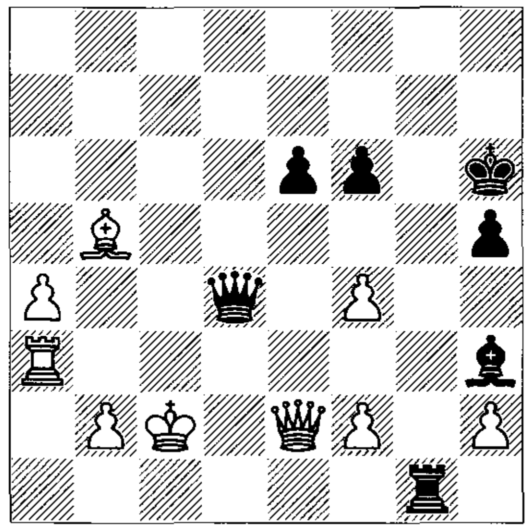
An effective reorganization of the forces. The bishop covers e6 and takes away key squares from White's pieces.

29 ♖a3?!

So far this has been a high-class game, but with time-pressure approaching Kramnik falters. After 29 ♖d1! the most likely result of this fantastic game would still be a draw. A possible line given by Nielsen is 29...♖g1+ (29...♗f5!? is an interesting way for Black to keep things going) 30 ♔d2 ♖g2 31 ♕e3! ♖xf2+ 32 ♗e2 ♖xe2+!? 33 ♕xe2 ♗g4 34 ♕d3 ♕xb2+ 35 ♕c2 ♕d4+ 36 ♔c1 ♗xd1 37 ♕xd1 with a draw as 37...♕xf4+?? loses to 38 ♕d2. Still, even after the text-move the position is far from clear.

29...♖g1+ 30 ♔d2 ♕d4+ 31 ♔c2 *(D)*

B



31...♗g4?!

Now it is Anand's turn to proceed inaccurately. Correct was 31...♗f5+, when White has a choice:

a) 32 ♗d3 ♖g2 33 ♗xf5 ♖xf2 34 ♗d3 ♖xe2+ 35 ♗xe2 ♕e4+ 36 ♗d3 ♕xf4 37 a5 ♕xh2+ 38 ♔b1 h4 39 a6 ♕g1+ 40 ♔a2 ♕a7, and Black should win.

b) 32 ♔b3 ♖c1! 33 a5 ♕d5+! (an important and subtle point) 34 ♗c4 ♕b7+ 35 ♔a4 (35 ♗b5? ♗c2+ 36 ♔a2 ♕h1! is instant mate) 35...♖c2! 36 ♗a6 ♕d7+ 37 ♕b5 ♖c4+ 38 ♔b3 ♕d3+ 39 ♔a2 ♕b1+ 40 ♔b3 ♖c2 41 ♖a2 ♗e4! 42 ♗b7 ♕d1 43 ♔a3 ♗xb7 44 ♕xb7 ♖c4 45 b3 ♕d6+ 46 ♔b2 ♕d2+ 47 ♔a3 ♕xa5+ 48 ♔b2 ♕c3+ 49 ♔a3 ♖c5, and according to Nielsen's extensive analysis Black wins.

c) 32 ♖d3! (best) 32...♖g2 (32...♖g4!?) 33 ♔b3 ♗xd3 34 ♕xd3 ♕xf2 35 ♕c3 ♕xf4 36 a5, and it is still a game as the a-pawn leaves White with at least practical chances.

32 f3?

Kramnik returns the favour. With 32 ♖d3! ♗f5 33 ♔b3 ♗xd3 34 ♕xd3 ♕xf2 35 ♕d8!, he could force a draw through perpetual check.

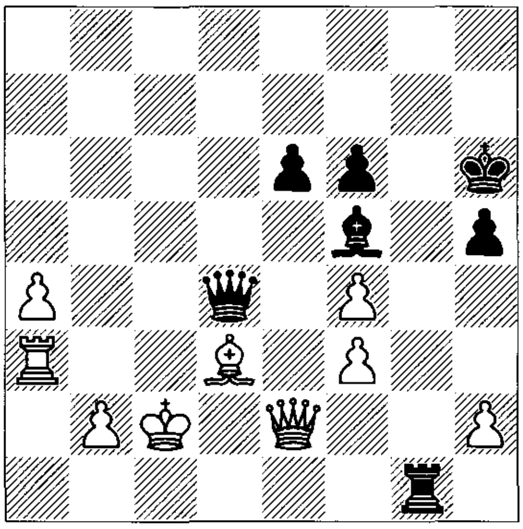
32...♗f5+ 33 ♗d3?! *(D)*

A better chance was 33 ♔b3, but as Gustafsson points out, Black wins by 33...♖c1 34 a5 ♕d5+! 35 ♗c4 ♕b7+ 36 ♔a4 ♖c2! 37 ♗a6 ♕xb2.

33...♗h3?!

Anand misses a simple win and for a second horror arose in his camp, which was following the game with engines on – until someone calmed the seconds' nerves by shouting "still plus four!", referring to the evaluation of the position by the silicon monsters after the text-move. Black is still comfortably winning. However, simply 33...♗xd3+ 34 ♖xd3 (34 ♕xd3

B



♖g2+) 34...♕c4+ mates or wins huge amounts of material.

34 a5

The last chance was 34 ♕d2, when Black still needs to be accurate. The win is pointed out by Nielsen: 34...♖g2 35 ♗e2 ♗f5+ 36 ♔c1 ♕g1+ 37 ♕d1 ♕xh2 38 ♔d2 h4! 39 a5 ♕xf4+ 40 ♔c3 h3 41 a6 h2 42 a7 ♖xe2 43 ♕xe2 h1♕ 44 a8♕ ♕c7+! 45 ♔b4 ♕b6+ 46 ♔a4 ♕h4+!, and wins.

34...♖g2 35 a6 ♖xe2+ 36 ♗xe2 ♗f5+

The rest is easy and White may as well have resigned here. Out of inertia Kramnik plays on until the time-control.

37 ♔b3 ♕e3+ 38 ♔a2 ♕xe2 39 a7 ♕c4+ 40 ♔a1 ♕f1+ 41 ♔a2 ♗b1+ 0-1

A fascinating struggle and a crushing defeat! After this win Vishy never looked back. Some commentators condemned Kramnik's choice of entering a sharp opening variation, and in *New In Chess* his good friend and former second Evgeny Bareev even went as far as saying that "going with Anand into a very complicated double-edged position as White without the necessary opening preparation was a crime against his supporters." However, what was Kramnik to do? He could have tried to bail out by, e.g., 15 ♗e4, but in a short match like this one – only 12 games – conceding easy draws with White is not pleasant. You cannot just bail out every time your opponent surprises you in the opening – at some point you have to call to see if it is a bluff, especially if your opening repertoire is not suited to playing for a win as Black. Kramnik's certainly isn't – since his successful match against Kasparov in 2000 Kramnik has perfected the classic strategy of blocking as Black and pressing as White, and before this match he hadn't won a game as Black for two years (the last one being game 2 against Topalov in Elista 2006, the infamous game in which Topalov missed a forced mate and instead went on to lose). The 'draw as Black and win as White' strategy is not bad *per se*, and I have employed it myself throughout my own career, but as I shall discuss in the last chapter of the book, I don't feel that it is in line with how chess will be played in the future. It is an old and classic strategy which has by now been worn out. One feature that characterizes the up-and-coming generation (Carlsen, Kariakin, Caruana, So et al.) is that they seem more pragmatic regarding colour than previous generations.

Kramnik – Anand

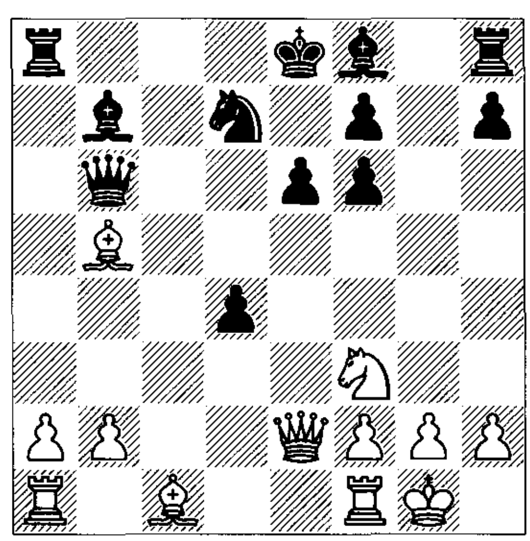
World Ch match (game 5), Bonn 2008

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 e3 ♘bd7 6 ♗d3 dxc4 7 ♗xc4 b5 8 ♗d3 a6 9 e4 c5 10 e5 cxd4 11 ♘xb5 axb5 12 exf6 gxf6 13 0-0 ♕b6 14 ♕e2 ♗b7

Anand sticks to his guns and in the process answers an obvious question: his choice of this line in game 3 was not a bluff – he really believes in it and by repeating it issues a challenge to his opponent. At the press conference following game 3, Kramnik had said that he "had no confidence in Black's position at all". So there we have it: the two top guns in the world going at it, armed with hours of computer analysis, into a position that they apparently evaluate on fundamentally different terms. What a rich game chess is!

15 ♗xb5 *(D)*

B



15...♖g8!?

Anand deviates first! Probably 15...♖g8 is not objectively better than 15...♗d6, but in high-

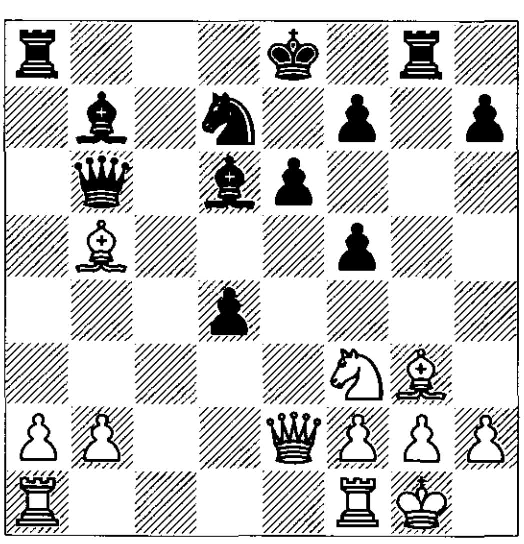
level chess, psychology matters as well. Being the first to spring a surprise on your opponent adds a few points to the psychology account. In *Schach*, Greenfeld raises an interesting point concerning Anand's choice of 15...♗d6 in game 3 and 15...♖g8 in game 5 rather than the other way around. The latter move is actually the most natural but has the weakness of allowing White the manoeuvre ♗f4-g3 (which Kramnik also chooses in the game), from where the bishop safeguards the king and controls vital dark squares in the centre. Had Anand therefore chosen 15...♖g8 first, it would have been easy for Kramnik to anticipate 'the improvement' 15...♗d6, taking away the ♗f4-g3 option. As it is, however, Kramnik seems to have underestimated 15...♖g8 somewhat in his preparation for game 5. While his next – natural – move followed swiftly, he soon began spending a lot of valuable time – time that he could have done with during the later stages of the game. While I am sure that Kramnik and his team had examined 15...♖g8 – being such an obvious move – it seems fair to conclude that Anand and his team had once again out-prepared the opponent. Perhaps Kramnik had indeed believed that this sharp line was just a one-off surprise by Anand, just as his choice of the sharp 4 f3!? in the Nimzo-Indian in game 2, which he did not repeat in game 4 despite the fact that he was clearly better out of the opening in game 2.

16 ♗f4 ♗d6 17 ♗g3

17 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 18 ♖fd1 e5!? (18...♔f8 19 ♖xd4 ♖xg2+! 20 ♔f1 ♕c5 is fine too, as pointed out by Greenfeld) 19 ♖xd4 ♕xd4! 20 ♘xd4 ♗xg2 is one more of these sharp, home-cooked lines that ultimately force a draw – White cannot avoid a perpetual check by ...♗h3+ and ...♗g2+.

17...f5! *(D)*

W



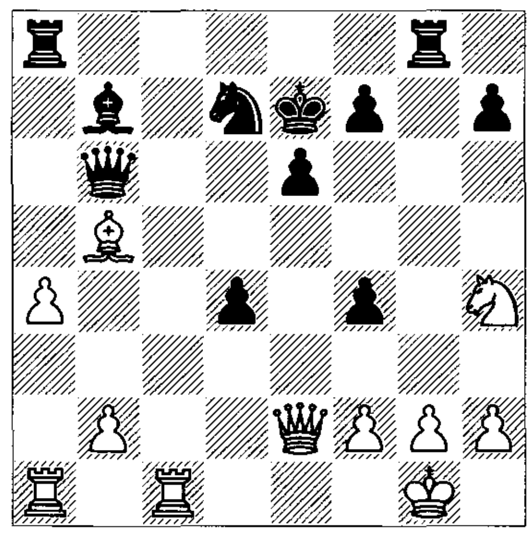
Anand is out for blood! The text-move looks risky due to 18 ♘e5, when 18...♗xe5? 19 ♕xe5 is clearly better for White. However, instead Black just ignores the threat to the d7-knight and gets on with business: 18...d3! 19 ♗xd7+ ♔e7 20 ♕e1 f4!, and the attack crashes through.

18 ♖fc1!?

Stopping Black's queen from joining the party via c5.

18...f4 19 ♗h4 ♗e7 20 a4 ♗xh4 21 ♘xh4 ♔e7! *(D)*

W



The critical position of the game, where Kramnik starts to flounder. It is unclear whether Anand was still in his preparation, but his second Peter Heine Nielsen gives the line 22 g3 fxg3 23 hxg3 ♖g5 24 ♗xd7 ♖ag8! 25 a5 ♕d6 26 ♖a3 ♖xg3+! 27 fxg3 ♖xg3+ 28 ♖xg3 (28 ♔f2 ♖g5!) 28...♕xg3+ 29 ♘g2 ♗xg2 30 ♕f2 ♕g5!! 31 ♖c7 ♗e4+ 32 ♔h2 ♕h5+ 33 ♔g3 ♕g5+ with (another) perpetual. If White is to prove an edge here, he should probably try 22 ♕h5, although 22...♖g7 looks OK for Black. It is a fateful coincidence that here too – just as in game 3 – the move ♖a3 is flawed and signals the beginning of the end for Kramnik.

22 ♖a3?! ♖ac8!?

22...♖g5 was a playable alternative, whereas 22...♖xg2+? does not work here because of 23 ♘xg2 ♖g8 24 ♖f3!, winning.

23 ♖xc8

Perhaps White could consider 23 ♖d1!?.

23...♖xc8 24 ♖a1 ♕c5!

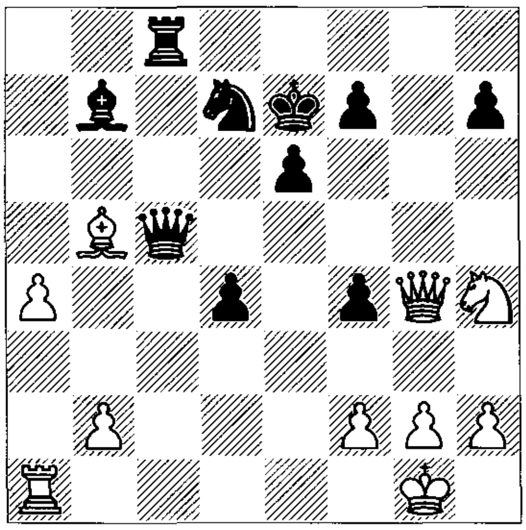
The point behind 22...♖ac8 – Black's queen gains access to the centre.

25 ♕g4 *(D)*

25...♕e5!

A strong centralization, and excellent judgement. Black could force a draw by 25...♕c2 26

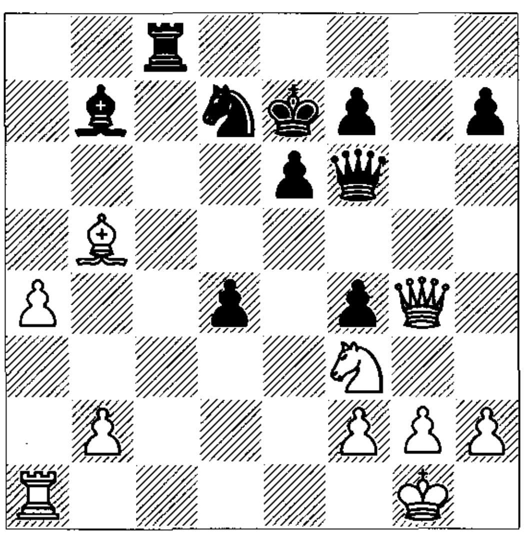
B



♕xf4 d3 27 ♘f5+ exf5 28 ♖e1+ ♔f8 29 ♕h6+ ♔g8 30 ♗xd7 d2, when White must give perpetual check. However, there is no reason to go for this line – while Black may not be objectively better here, his position is easier to play. Notice that White's two connected passed pawns on the queenside will only play a role in an eventual endgame – for now it is the play in the centre and the relative weakness of both kings that are the main features of the position.

26 ♘f3 ♕f6 *(D)*

W

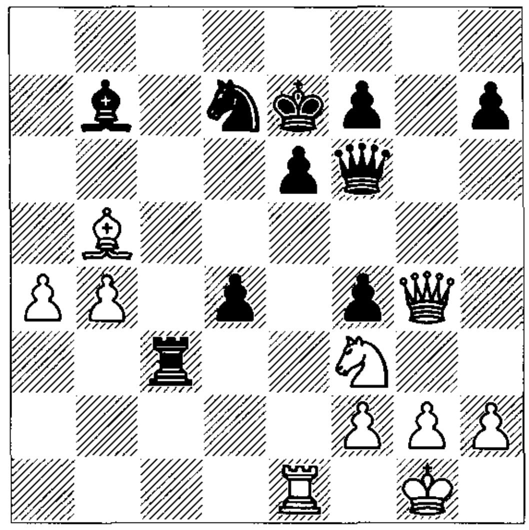


27 ♖e1?!

White has a lot of options here, and the move chosen is presumably not the strongest. 27 ♘xd4? loses to the same combination as in the game – 27...♕xd4 28 ♖d1 ♘f6! 29 ♖xd4 ♘xg4 30 ♖d7+ ♔f6 31 ♖xb7 ♖c1+ 32 ♗f1 ♘e3! 33 fxe3 fxe3, and wins. Did Kramnik see this pattern here and then forget about it two moves later? Probably not; as Peter Heine Nielsen speculates, it is more likely that Kramnik refrained from 27 ♘xd4 because of 27...♖c5, although this turns out to be good for White after 28 ♖d1! ♖g5 29 ♘f5+ ♔f8 30 ♕xf4 exf5 31 ♖xd7 ♗xg2 32 ♖d3!. White should probably go for either 27 ♗xd7 ♔xd7 28 ♘xd4 ♔e7 with a likely draw, or the typical prophylactic 'Kramnik move' 27 ♘e1!?, defending c2 and g2 and dreaming of a blockading knight on d3 in the endgame.

27...♖c5 28 b4 ♖c3 *(D)*

W

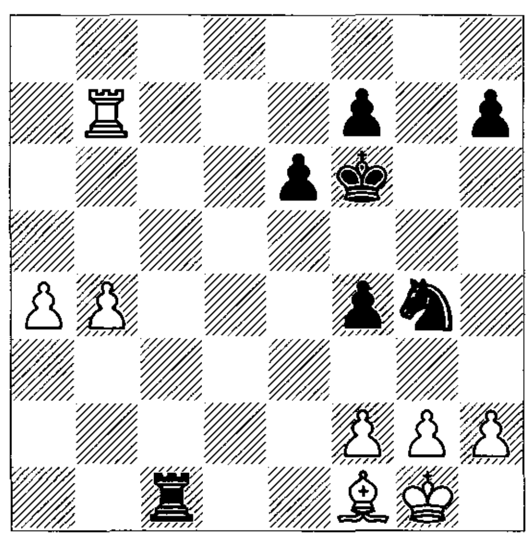


29 ♘xd4??

Down to his last 15 minutes – not much for such a complicated position – Kramnik blunders. Correct was 29 ♕h5, when there is still all to play for, although I prefer Black due to his centralized forces.

29...♕xd4 30 ♖d1 ♘f6! 31 ♖xd4 ♘xg4 32 ♖d7+ ♔f6 33 ♖xb7 ♖c1+ 34 ♗f1 *(D)*

B



34...♘e3!

Ouch! Kramnik presumably thought Black had to play 34...♘xh2 35 ♔xh2 ♖xf1, but this seems rather hopeless after 36 f3 – now the two passed pawns really do matter!

35 fxe3 fxe3 0-1

The only defence against 36...e2 is 36 ♖c7, but then 36...♖xc7 37 g3 ♖c1 38 ♔g2 ♖c2+! 39 ♔f3 (39 ♔g1 e2) 39...♖f2+ wins the bishop.

Anand won the match by a convincing margin – 6½-4½. It is great for the world of chess

that finally – for the first time since 1993, when Kasparov and Short broke away from FIDE – we have one and only one World Champion. No FIDE Champion, Braingames Champion, Match Champion or Tournament Champion – just World Champion Anand.

However, in a historical perspective the Anand-Kramnik match is tremendously important for another reason: it may mark the final breakaway from the Soviet/Russian dominance of top chess, which has existed since World War II. Quite tellingly, shortly after the match, the Russian team – with Kramnik scoring eight draws and a win on board one – for the third time running failed to win the Chess Olympiad. And unlike Fischer's brief reign in the early 1970s, this time it is likely that the hegemony has been broken for good. Some of the most likely long-term successors to Anand – most notably Magnus Carlsen (Norway) or Sergei Kariakin (Ukraine), but also players like Fabiano Caruana (Italy), Wesley So (Philippines) or Parimarjan Negi (India) – have not been raised in the 'Soviet School of Chess'. As I noted in Chapter 2, it is likely that on a national level countries like China or India will soon take over as the dominant forces of the chess world. I believe that this development is not a coincidence but an example of 'Darwinian evolution' applied to the chess world. The Soviet/Russian School of chess training, as coined by Botvinnik, emphasizes systematic study, analytical scrutiny, profound knowledge of chess history and contemporary theory, and 'play by the book'. This approach was well suited to the earlier eras that we have explored in this book, but they may not necessarily be sufficient to excel in the era of Creative Concreteness. Sure, systematic study, analytical scrutiny and awareness of chess history and contemporary theory are still vital components of any chess-player's development, and the importance of these skills forms the basic tenet of this book. However, these days they are not sufficient for competitive *advantage* over peers, they only lead to competitive *parity*. In a time when any chess-player around the globe has unhindered access to databases with all old and new games and a powerful analysis engine at his or her fingertips, it takes a little extra to stand out. As the title of this chapter suggests, I believe this 'little extra' is *creativity*, the ability to find new patterns in the abundance of old data that exist on chess, and take the (calculated) risk of going into new avenues that were hitherto frowned upon by conventional wisdom. The problem for the Soviet School is that this approach of creativity and calculated risk – as excellently applied by Anand in his match with Kramnik – runs counter to the systematic approach that the school advocates. As Kasparov stated in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, today's chess-players have to move beyond the basic and universal to obtain an edge. That is the reason why I foresee that other, more 'unstructured' (chess) cultures are likely to take over where the structured Soviet School of Chess has left off.

The current era is certainly one of Creative Concreteness – the contemporary top players have convincingly shown that chess is far from exhausted. However, even the current era will come to an end. New ideas will be discovered and novel styles of play will emerge. In the concluding chapter of the book I shall look into the crystal ball and attempt to predict how chess is likely to evolve in the next decades.

How many things are looked upon as quite impossible until they have been actually effected.
PLINY THE ELDER

7 Chess in the Future – The Era of Transformation

Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future.
NIELS BOHR

As my great countryman, physicist and Nobel laureate Niels Bohr once observed, it is difficult to make predictions about the future. Still, in this chapter I shall take the risk and come up with some features that I predict will characterize chess in the future.

I have labelled this coming age the Era of Transformation, because I believe that one of the most important features of successful competitive chess-players in the future will be the ability to continuously 'transform themselves' according to the opponent on the other side of the board and the position on the board. This may be said to be an expansion of the Age of Universality, but while that era focused on universality *on* the board, future chess-players will need to take factors from *off* the board more into consideration in order to be successful, most notably the styles of the two opposing players. However, let us not get ahead of ourselves here; let me first list the six features that I predict will characterize the next generation of chess-players.

- Players will need to continuously transform themselves according to the opponent they are facing, and the specific position on the board. Psychology will play an increasingly important role in this process.
- In order to be able to adapt themselves to the opponent and the context, players need to possess a broad opening repertoire; the days of a narrow and rigid opening repertoire are over.
- In order to circumvent the rising impact of powerful analysis engines in preparation – which tend to level the playing field, making it difficult to stand out – we shall see an increase in the use of openings that are *strategically* complex rather than sharp and *tactically* complex (along with some that are strategically *and* tactically complex), thus postponing tactical hostilities to later in the game.
- Players will be more pragmatic regarding colour; the old adage of 'blocking as Black and pressing with White' doesn't apply any more; you have to look for chances with both colours, and the distinction between playing White and Black will decrease.
- To overcome a well-prepared and versatile opponent, it is sometimes necessary to take calculated risks; to succeed in the future, chess-players will need courage, resourcefulness and inventiveness to put the opponent under pressure.
- Since the use of databases and analysis engines tend to level the playing field in the opening, making it increasingly difficult to obtain an edge out of the opening against well-prepared opponents (even though they may be weaker than you), successful chess-players will need a lot of energy and stamina to be able to endure long games. If you cannot outplay your opponent in preparation, you will have to do it at the board through long games and persistent pressure. Chess will increasingly become a physical 'young man's game'.

Let's discuss these six characteristics in turn. In the discussion I shall mainly draw upon games from the young generation, since these players – e.g., Magnus Carlsen, Sergei Kariakin, Fabiano Caruana, Wesley So, Hou Yifan, etc. – will undoubtedly be the future of chess. Looking through the games of these young talents for this book has convinced me that this future will be a bright one!

Transforming Yourself to the Opponent and Situation

The American authors B. Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, in their interesting book of the same name, claim that the current era in society is 'The Experience Economy', in which consumers are increasingly interested in purchasing experiences. People want to have a good time and experience some excitement in their lives! However, in the future even nice experiences won't be enough to satisfy consumers' needs; people will not just want to experience something in their lives, they want to be able to *transform* their lives into something better. Thus Pine and Gilmore predict that the future will be a 'Transformation Economy'.

Adapting this to chess, I predict that chess-players in the future will need to be 'chameleons' who are continuously able to transform themselves to the needs of the context. Psychology will be of increasing importance, and in order to escape the stronghold of the opponent's home-cooked, computer-aided preparation, future chess-players will need to adapt to each opponent and consider how best to 'play the man'. This goes beyond just picking a particular opening against a particular opponent; you must understand your opponent on a deeper level, not just chess-wise but also psychologically. For example, in a recent issue of *Chess Life*, Andy Soltis discussed how chess-players react very differently to a loss – the *post-loss syndrome* (PLS). I also know from experience that chess-players exhibit all kinds of psychological traits – for example, some players are very anxious when their king is under attack (even if the attack is not really dangerous); others play well below their actual strength against higher-rated opponents; while others again perform much better at the beginning of tournaments than at the end. Exploiting such insights – e.g., by playing aggressively against an opponent known to react badly to a loss, giving him no time to relax with an easy draw, as often recommended by the Soviet School of chess as the right reaction to a loss, or 'faking' an attack against an overly anxious opponent – will become increasingly valuable in a future where easy access to all kinds of chess information is readily available to any chess-player via the Internet, databases and analysis engines. Securing an edge in the opening no longer just depends on your playing skills, but the strength of your computer and your skill at working with it. The shrewd chess-player of the future will try to go beyond that and 'play the man'.

In recent years, chess has increasingly become a 'computer game' with a lot of reliance on analysis engines and databases. In my view it is necessary to 'reclaim chess' from the jaws of the silicon monsters. Computers and their outputs are means, not ends. Chess is a human game, not a computer game! Now, I am not suggesting that chess-players should not use the electronic aides – far from it. Computers will have a significant impact on chess forever, and all ambitious chess-players need to work hard with databases and analysis engines. They are indispensable tools these days. In an interview shortly after the World Championship match against Kramnik, Anand noted: "Progressively, it has become impossible for people to work without computers. Nowadays, it's very difficult, if not impossible [to play chess successfully without computers] ... I am looking at more opportunities than I used to [before using computers]. My way of looking for unusual moves, moves that don't fit into the pattern recognition, has improved because of working with computers."

However, computers help mainly to avoid a competitive *dis*advantage vis-à-vis our opponents. We need to recognize that the computer revolution has led to a certain levelling of the playing field; computers tend to lead to competitive parity, where even nominally weaker players are able to compete through extensive computer-supported preparation. To demonstrate a competitive advantage over such players, you have to – paraphrasing Bent Larsen's old saying – "get them out of their computer". This is where psychology comes in – after all, competitive chess is a game for humans, and humans have distinct psychological traits! All individuals have particular strengths and weaknesses; there are no perfect or uniform humans. These psychological traits must be evaluated and understood, in order to be used in the competitive context. However, of course it is not enough to be able to *identify* particular traits in

your opponent's and your own style and psychological profile; you must also be able to *exploit* these insights. This is where transformation kicks in; players who are able to adapt to the given opponent will have a competitive edge in the future – flexibility to transform your way of playing is an important skill. Sometimes you need to be aggressive, sometimes defensive, and you need to be able to shift gears during the game, making life – as least for a few hours – as difficult as possible for the opponent.

Readers of my earlier book, *Foundations of Chess Strategy*, will recall that I divide chess-players into four distinct types – activists, pragmatics, reflectors and theorists. *Activists* are aggressive risk-takers who strive for the initiative and who prefer lively positions. Activists possess a strong intuitive feel for sharp positions and often value the initiative above material. Typical activists among the current world elite are Anand, Topalov and Shirov. *Pragmatics* too are aggressive and are very strong in attack, but they have a more systematic and logical approach to chess, where activists are more intuitive. Pragmatics calculate variations very well and often drive opening theory forward by having very sharp and well-prepared openings. Pragmatics among the world elite include Ivanchuk, Svidler, Radjabov and Kariakin. *Reflectors* thrive on positional play and have a great intuitive feeling for how best to coordinate the forces. They collect tiny advantages, which they gradually compound and exploit in fine endgames. Typical reflectors in the top of modern world chess are Aronian and Carlsen. And finally *theorists* possess a highly sophisticated feel for the pawn-structure and excel in closed, manoeuvring positions. Theorists' games are often very logical and their opening repertoires solid and long-lasting. The two main theorists in the world elite are Kramnik and Leko.

In *Foundations of Chess Strategy*, I predicted that we would see an increase in World Champions from the activist category, because their core competences fit well to the modern age of ever-shorter time-controls, and with their risk-willingness they are ready to take chess beyond the logical and systematic approach supported by computers and into the realm of intuition and psychology. Given that two out of three World Champions since then – Topalov and Anand – have been activists, this prediction was rather successful! However, while I do believe that activists will have good chances also in the future, I shall also point to reflectors as dangerous competitors to the World Crown. The reason that I predict a bright future for these two categories is that I feel that their core competences best fit the requirements for the future of chess, which I outline in this chapter. As with activists, reflectors have a strong *intuitive* feel – activists for sharp positions, reflectors for strategic ones – and one of my key points is that to be successful in the future, top players need to break away from the competitive parity that the computer revolution has led to, and for that human traits like strong intuition, risk-willingness and feel for psychology are essential.

An excellent example of this approach is Anand's convincing victory in the 2008 World Championship match against Kramnik. His sharp play with both colours – and especially Black – was the perfect way for an activist to take on a theorist. As outlined above, activists like Anand are courageous and willing to take risks, while theorists like Kramnik are systematic players who value strict objectivity. Look at how differently the two players evaluated the sharp Meran Variation that Anand successfully employed in games 3 and 5 of their match (see Chapter 6). Kramnik tried to prove that objectively the variation is unsound for Black, and that White is better. Be that as it may; Anand realized that the objective evaluation of the line (which it might take dozens of high-level grandmaster games to reach) was of less importance than the fact that activists play this type of chaotic position better than theorists. It is curious that this is a reversed version of the Kasparov-Kramnik match in 2000. In that match Kasparov made the same mistake: he kept taking on Kramnik in the Berlin Defence of the Ruy Lopez in order to prove that White is objectively better here – not taking into account that theorists like Berlin-type positions much more than pragmatics.

It is also noteworthy that even after Anand won the match convincingly, some pundits kept claiming that Kramnik has the best understanding of chess of any living being in the world. Perhaps, but nowadays, and even more so in the

future, pure chess factors are not the only determining factor of success in chess. You need to be able to transform yourself and 'play the man'. Anand has managed this transformation, and in *New In Chess* Kasparov praised the Indian's approach in the match under the headline *An Old Cat Learns New Tricks*. That's what it takes to be successful in the competitive chess world of the future!

In fact, the discussion of objectivity vs subjectivity has been going on in chess for decades. In his interesting book, *Psychology in Chess* (German version), Russian grandmaster and psychologist Nikolai Krogius discusses the opening repertoire of the former World Champion Max Euwe. Euwe had a broad and diligently researched opening repertoire, but according to Krogius he often made the mistake of choosing openings according to how recently and how thoroughly he had analysed them rather than choosing openings depending on the opponent at hand. That is, an objectivist rather than subjectivist approach. I agree with Krogius that openings should be chosen according to the opponent – as I pointed out in *How Chess Games are Won and Lost*, I have always favoured a rather broad opening repertoire over a narrow one, because that allows greater flexibility to choose openings depending on the opponent. However, in recent years – probably due to the computer revolution – there seem to have been mostly 'objectivists' around in chess. Many chess-players tend to believe in computer evaluations as 'the truth'. However, as I pointed out in *Foundations of Chess Strategy*, I believe this approach is flawed. Chess is *not* an objective game; it is a subjective struggle between two individuals, who have to cope not just with what happens on the board but all the psychological pressure surrounding a tense game.

First and foremost, competitive chess is about defeating the opponent, and to do that you sometimes have to 'play the man' – exploit your strengths and pound on your opponent's weaknesses. Then *after* the game we may (try to) look for the 'truth' about the game, but *during* the game the objective evaluation is of little relevance, if the position doesn't match your style and you don't know how to proceed! The matches Kasparov-Kramnik and Anand-Kramnik are testimony that the objective approach sometimes succumbs to the subjective approach even at the highest level. And the ability to transform your game to meet the requirements of the situation and opponent will be of utmost importance in the future – hence the headline 'The Era of Transformation'.

One young player who exhibited shrewd psychological alertness from an early age is Magnus Carlsen. The young Norwegian shows extraordinary talent not just on the board, but also off it in the choice of approach against each individual opponent. Just take a look at how easily he disposes of one of the strongest and best-prepared players in the world, Veselin Topalov.

Topalov – Carlsen
Morelia/Linares 2008

1 e4 ♘f6!

Alekhine's Defence – a rare guest on the highest level! However, it is a clever choice by Magnus against Topalov. The Bulgarian is one of the best prepared players in the world – just recall the fantastic novelty 12 ♘xf7! against Kramnik in Chapter 6 – but Magnus had noticed that he mainly focuses on the most fashionable and topical variations. It is probably a while ago that he last seriously analysed the old Alekhine! While Carlsen had occasionally played this opening in the past, I am sure that it was a surprise for Topalov.

2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5 ♘xe5 c6

A solid line favoured by, among others, the late Tony Miles.

6 ♗d3

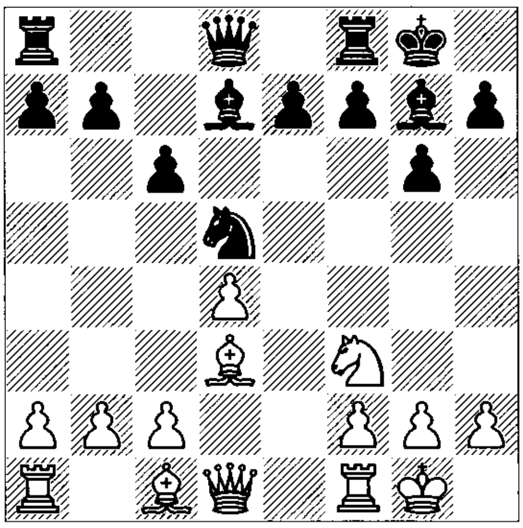
6 ♗c4 ♘d7 7 ♘xd7 ♗xd7 8 ♕f3 e6 9 0-0 ♕f6 10 ♕xf6 ♘xf6 ultimately led to a draw in Haba-Carlsen, European Clubs Cup, Kemer 2007.

6...♘d7 7 ♘xd7

This doesn't really challenge Black's set-up. 7 0-0 ♘xe5 8 dxe5 ♘b4 9 ♗e4 ♕xd1 10 ♖xd1 f5 11 a3! ♘a6 12 ♗f3 g6 13 ♘d2 ♗e6 14 ♗e2 ♘c7 15 ♘f3 ♗d5 16 ♘d4 ♗g7 17 c4 ♗f7 18 f4 led to an edge for White and an ultimate win in Sutovsky-Carlsen, European Clubs Cup, Rethymnon 2003.

7...♗xd7 8 0-0 g6 9 ♘d2 ♗g7 10 ♘f3 0-0 *(D)*

W



11 ♖e1?!

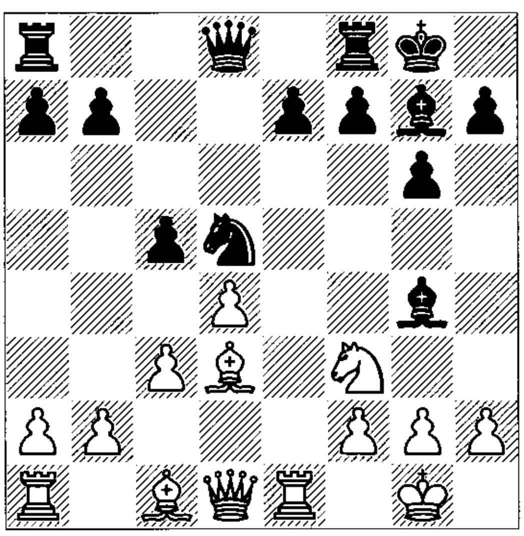
Black's opening gamble pays off! Topalov drops his guard and plays an unfortunate 'natural move' without delving sufficiently into the position. With the immediate 11 c3 White could claim an edge – now he has to fight for equality.

11...♗g4!

Suddenly White has problems with his d4-pawn.

12 c3 c5! *(D)*

W



Oops – it was probably only here that Topalov noticed the small trick 13 dxc5 ♘xc3! 14 bxc3 ♗xc3. Now we see why 11 ♖e1 was inaccurate: the rook is hanging on this square. Still, White should have entered this line – he could bail out to a draw by 15 ♗h6! ♗xe1 16 ♗xf8 ♔xf8 17 ♗e4! ♕xd1 18 ♖xd1 ♗a5 19 ♗xb7 ♖b8 20 c6 ♗xf3 21 gxf3 ♖d8 22 ♖xd8+ ♗xd8. I am sure that a more defensively inclined player would have chosen this option. However, here we see a minor psychological weakness of activists: the willingness to take risks sometimes backfires. Even when he has been tricked in the opening, Topalov prefers to keep the game going. A reflector, on the other hand, would presumably have chosen to bail out with a draw. As I pointed out in *Foundations of Chess Strategy*, reflectors are sometimes accused of playing too many draws, but these draws sometimes occur because reflectors possess a keenly developed sense of danger, which helps them sense when it is time to bail out.

13 ♗e4?! cxd4 14 cxd4 e6

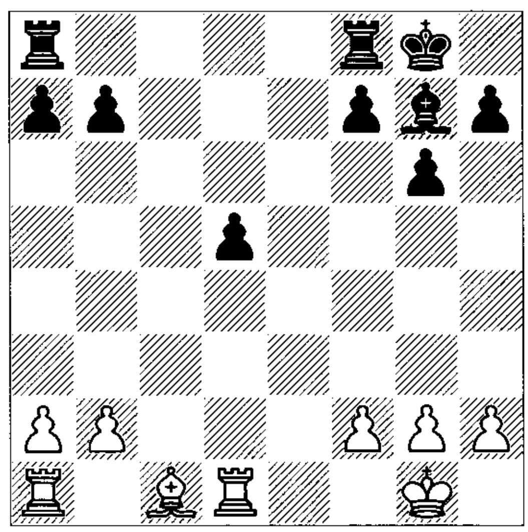
And there we have it – without doing anything more than picking the right opening for the right occasion, Black has managed to obtain a solid edge after only 14 moves against a 2780 player known to be fearsome as White.

15 ♕b3?!

Topalov continues to flounder. Correct was 15 ♕a4, although Black has a pleasant position because of White's weak d4-pawn. The text-move ultimately leads to an endgame with an extra pawn for Black.

15...♗xf3 16 ♗xf3 ♗xd4 17 ♗xd5 ♕xd5 18 ♕xd5 exd5 19 ♖d1 ♗g7 *(D)*

W



20 ♔f1

Topalov gives in to the inevitable. 20 ♖xd5 ♖fd8 21 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 22 ♗e3 (22 ♗g5 ♖d5) 22...♗xb2 23 ♖b1 b6! allows Black to preserve his extra pawn due to White's weak back rank. The rest is merely a matter of technique, and as Timman points out in *New In Chess*, the young Norwegian has excellent technique which is reminiscent of the young Karpov. In my view this is an apt comparison, which is one reason why I placed Carlsen in the same category as Karpov, as a reflector.

20...♖fd8 21 ♗g5 ♖d7 22 ♖d2 h6 23 ♗e3 d4 24 ♖d3 ♖c8 25 ♗d2 ♖c2 26 ♖b1 ♖e7 27 a4 f5 28 b3 ♖ec7 29 ♗e1 ♔f7

Black patiently improves his position.

30 ♖d2 ♖c1! 31 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 32 ♔e2 ♖b1 33 ♖d3 ♔e6 34 h4 ♔d5!

White is helpless against the advancing king.

35 ♗d2 ♔e4 36 ♖g3

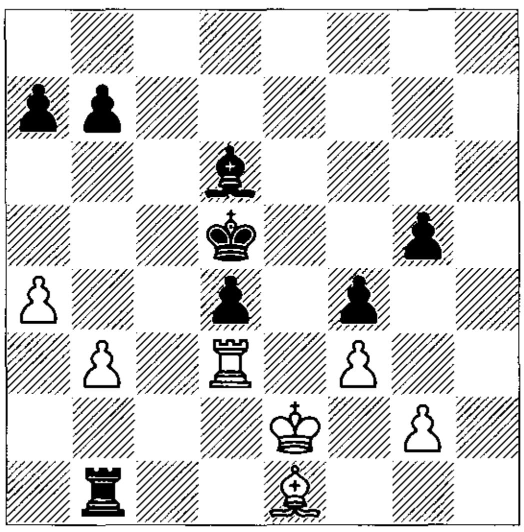
After 36 f3+ ♔d5 White has no useful move.

36...f4! 37 ♖d3

37 ♖xg6? d3# is a neat mate.

37...♗e5 38 f3+ ♔d5 39 ♗e1 ♗d6 40 ♗d2 g5 41 hxg5 hxg5 42 ♗e1 *(D)*

B



42...g4!

The final stroke.

43 fxg4 ♔e4! 44 g5 0-1

White resigned without awaiting 44...♖xe1+! 45 ♔xe1 ♔xd3. 44 ♖h3 would not have helped him either because of 44...d3+! 45 ♖xd3 ♖xe1+! 46 ♔xe1 ♔xd3, and wins. An easy win for Carlsen, which surely would not have been this easy if he had chosen a main line!

The Need for a Broad Opening Repertoire

In order to be able to transform yourself according to the opponent and the context, for future chess-players it is necessary to have a broad opening repertoire. As White, you need to be able to play both 1 e4 and 1 d4, and as Black you must have several defences at your disposal against White's two main opening moves. Over the past 25 years we have seen an increase in players who switch confidently between 1 e4 and 1 d4, and this trend is likely to continue. And it should, in order to allow players maximum flexibility in their choice of opening against particular opponents.

Although throughout chess history we have seen a few players with the ability to handle both 1 e4 and 1 d4 openings – e.g., Alekhine, Capablanca and Spassky – I credit the Karpov-Kasparov matches in the 1980s as the main driver of this trend. Both of these great players have proven their mastery of both opening moves throughout their careers, and this was one (among others) of the reasons for their dual supremacy lasting from the mid-1970s (when Karpov was crowned World Champion after Fischer refused to defend his title) and until Kasparov's retirement in 2005 (although he lost his World Championship title to Kramnik in 2000, I – and I suppose many others – still considered Kasparov the strongest player around).

In *Kasparov vs Karpov*, Kasparov explains his and his team's preparation for the first match against Karpov and draws a line all the way to his loss against Kramnik: "we studied a number of variations for both sides, in order if necessary to employ them with both White and Black. This greatly helped me in the critical situations which arose soon after the start of the match *[when Karpov leapt to a 4-0 lead after only nine games – LBH]*. The employment of one and the same opening for both sides did not cause me any psychological discomfort. Such flexibility, unique for grandmasters of that period, played a major role in the 1984-5 matches: largely thanks to it I first overcame the consequences of my catastrophic start, and then seized the opening initiative, which asserted my success in the second match. (Unfortunately, later, at the turn of the millennium, I lacked my usual 'omnivorous' and flexible opening approach: the loss in my 2000 match to Kramnik can be put down to a definite 'rigidity of consciousness' – an unwillingness to constantly expand my opening repertoire, although the opportunities for good-quality preparation were no less than in 1984.)" In other words, Kasparov credits his broad opening repertoire for ultimately taking the World Championship title from Karpov, and his lack of broadness in the 2000 match with Kramnik (where he constantly kept banging his head against Kramnik's 'Berlin Wall' with 1 e4, when all commentators cried out for him to shift to 1 d4) as defining factors of both success and failure. I certainly agree with this analysis, and I can only add that in the future the need for a broad opening repertoire will only increase.

This may sound straightforward – "just expand your opening repertoire, and you will be

fine". However, it is not that easy – not all players, even the most talented ones, are able to handle the vastly different positions arising after 1 e4 and 1 d4. After winning the World Championship from Kasparov, Kramnik – an inveterate 1 d4 or 1 ♘f3 + 2 c4 player – tried to expand his white repertoire by adopting 1 e4, but with little success. This inability to transform himself was probably one of the reasons for his downfall against Anand in the 2008 World Championship. The Indian proved to be the more versatile player, and he successfully managed to expand *his* opening repertoire by adopting 1 d4 in the match. Only in the final game, when he just needed a draw, did Anand revert to his usual 1 e4 and secured the needed draw with ease. This is the kind of flexibility that a broad opening repertoire gives you. It is interesting to see the analogy to how Fischer expanded his opening repertoire for the 1972 World Championship match with Spassky in Reykjavik.

Of the young generation, Magnus Carlsen is by far the player with the broadest repertoire. He plays all kinds of openings, and as Timman points out in *New In Chess*, he "seems to feel at home in all of them. As a result, it is very hard to catch him by surprise." A brief search in the database reveals that the Norwegian is indeed a very versatile player. As White he switches effortlessly between 1 e4 and 1 d4, recently with the addition of the occasional 1 c4 or 1 ♘f3. As Black against 1 e4 he employs various Sicilians, the Caro-Kann, the Petroff, the Alekhine, and he defends the Ruy Lopez in both its Open and Closed forms, as well as the Berlin Defence. Against 1 d4 you may find the Nimzo-Indian, Queen's Indian, King's Indian, an occasional Benko Gambit, the Queen's Gambit Declined, the Grünfeld, the Semi-Slav or the Open Slav. In my view, such versatility will be a requirement for all contenders to the chess throne in the future.

Strategically Complex Openings

As noted before, the computer revolution has changed the way contemporary players approach chess, and with it we have seen how difficult it is to obtain an edge in the opening. This is especially true for sharp, tactical openings, in which a powerful analysis engine will help any chess-player to feel well prepared. It is in this kind of position that computers are at their best. However, as I observed in *How Chess Games are Won and Lost*, there are two dangers in working with and relying on computers – the *horizon problem* and the *understanding problem.*

The horizon problem refers to the fact that computers have a limit to how far ahead they can calculate; their evaluation of the position may change significantly with just an extra half-move added. That's because computers *calculate* chess, they don't *understand* it. This problem is likely to decrease in importance in the future, since computers become more and more powerful, allowing them to calculate farther and farther. While the problem persists, it is of less significance.

The situation is different regarding the understanding problem. This notion refers to the fundamental difference in how computers and humans approach chess. As noted above, computers rely on *calculations*, while humans emphasize *understanding*. In certain positions, analysis engines are of limited value since the evaluations rest on very subtle positional factors outside the realm of the computer's horizon, and to which the silicon monster has difficulty attaching the correct values. That is much easier for humans, trained as we are in pattern recognition.

This brings me to the third point regarding chess in the future: we shall see coming generations apply more and more strategically complex openings to overcome the problem of computer-based preparation that allows comparatively weaker players to compete on more level terms. For the stronger players to show their supremacy over weaker players, they need to get out of the opponent's 'computer', and that means choosing strategically complex openings rather than tactical ones. That's because the sharp, tactical openings lend themselves well to computer preparation and will over time be 'solved'. Thus, over time I predict a decrease in some of the sharpest Sicilians, while a strategically complex opening like the Closed Ruy Lopez will remain on the scene. It is not possible

to exhaust the Ruy Lopez through computer analysis – at least for years to come – because of the understanding problem, while some of the sharpest Sicilians will be analysed to death in the process of ever-expanding processing power by computers. Other strategically complex openings which will continue to be popular include the Berlin Ruy Lopez and the Meran Semi-Slav and Nimzo-/Queen's Indian complexes.

Another good example of a strategically complex opening is the Hedgehog, a line of the English that features a distinctive pawn-structure which may arise from several other openings. While this opening does not appear to be quite as trusted at top level as it used to be, it contains enough venom for even a skilled manoeuvring expert like Kramnik to falter. The following game is another example of Magnus Carlsen's ingenious choice of openings. Above we saw him effortlessly dispose of Topalov as Black, and here he inflicts the first loss as White on Kramnik in a year and a half by outplaying the Russian World Champion in a *strategically complex* middlegame.

Kramnik – Carlsen
Wijk aan Zee 2008

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3!?

Somewhat of a surprise. In recent years Kramnik has made a living with the Catalan (3 g3 or 3 d4 d5 4 g3), but in the Tal Memorial in Moscow just a few months earlier Carlsen confidently obtained a draw as Black against Kramnik after 3 g3 d5 4 d4 ♗e7 5 ♗g2 0-0 6 0-0 dxc4 7 ♕c2 a6 8 ♕xc4 b5 9 ♕c2 ♗b7 10 ♗d2 ♗d6 11 ♗g5 ♘bd7 12 ♘bd2 ♖c8 13 ♘b3 c5! 14 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 15 ♘xc5 ♗e4! 16 ♕c3 e5! 17 e3 ♗xc5 18 dxc5 ♕d5!, with good counterplay for Black.

3...c5!?

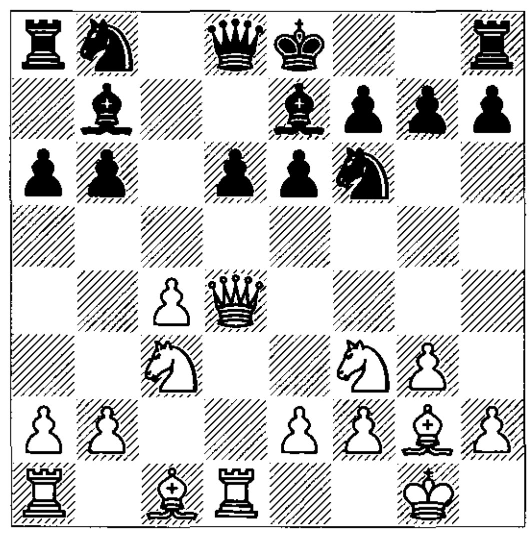
Surprised by his opponent's choice, Carlsen steers the game into a Hedgehog English rather than the Queen's Gambit Declined after 3...d5 4 d4. Once more a clever opening choice by the Norwegian, as there is little risk of nasty opening surprises in the Hedgehog – it leads to strategically difficult positions with chances for both sides.

4 g3 b6 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 6 0-0 ♗e7 7 d4

The alternative is 7 ♖e1, which Kramnik has occasionally employed in the past. However, recent practice has shown that 7...d5 8 cxd5 ♘xd5 is fine for Black; e.g., 9 d4 cxd4 10 ♕a4+!? (10 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 11 ♕xd4 0-0 12 ♗f4 ♘c6 13 ♕a4 ♘b4 14 a3 ♗c6 15 ♕b3 ♘d5 also led to equality in Tomashevsky-Adams, European Clubs Cup, Kemer 2007) 10...♘d7 11 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 12 ♘xd4 ♗xg2 13 ♔xg2 0-0 14 ♘c6 ♘c5!, and Black gradually equalized in Aronian-Yakovenko, FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2007, or 9 e4 ♘b4 10 d4 cxd4 11 ♘xd4 ♘8c6 12 ♘xc6 ♕xd1 13 ♖xd1 ♗xc6, and Black holds, as in several games by Adams and Leko. The text-move is more straightforward.

7...cxd4 8 ♕xd4 d6 9 ♖d1 a6 *(D)*

W



10 ♘g5

An old line, but not one which is thought to trouble Black unduly. I have tried 10 ♗g5 ♘bd7 11 ♕d2 a few times, with a slight edge for White.

10...♗xg2 11 ♔xg2 ♘c6!

The normal square for this knight in the Hedgehog is usually d7, but in this particular position the knight is fine on c6, leaving d7 free for the rook, where it will overprotect d6. By his own admission Carlsen was out of book here but still found the right set-up, even if this set-up wasn't trivial. Timman once said that, having grown up with computers, "Magnus Carlsen is not hampered by the prejudices that used to be part and parcel of classical chess." One of these prejudices is that in the Hedgehog the queen's knight 'always' belongs on d7, keeping the long diagonal open and eyeing c5 and e5.

12 ♕f4 0-0 13 ♘ce4 ♘e8!

Black calmly overprotects d6, his only weakness. Another old dictum, from the years of the

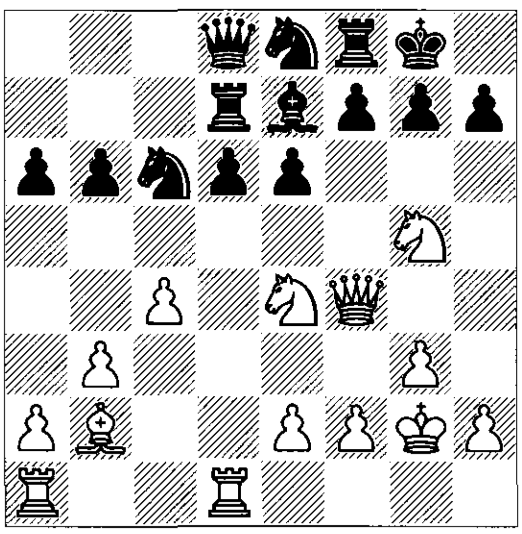
Scientific and Hypermodern Schools, claims that in cramped positions you should try to exchange pieces, and conversely the side with more space should avoid exchanges. However, the Hedgehog is an exception to this dogmatic rule. Here White would like to exchange a few pieces to take the sting out of Black's dynamism – a key trait of this opening, as ...b5, ...d5 or even ...f5 are always in the air – and eventually batter up against Black's vulnerable d6-pawn.

14 b3 ♖a7!

14...f5? doesn't work because of 15 ♘xe6 ♕c8 16 ♘xf8 fxe4 17 ♘xh7!, as pointed out by Larsen.

15 ♗b2 ♖d7 *(D)*

W



A fairly standard position has arisen out of the opening, but in the following moves Kramnik starts to drift and is gradually outplayed.

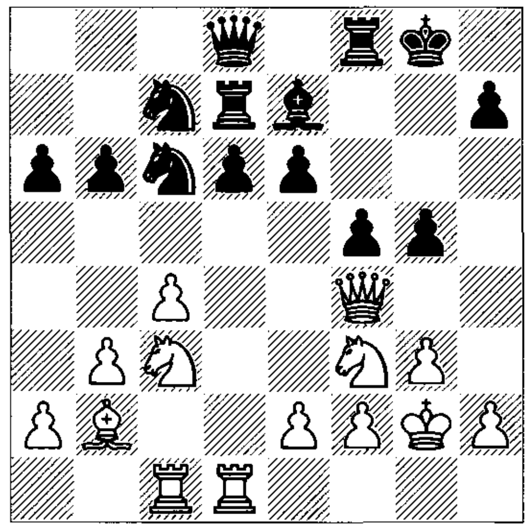
16 ♖ac1?!

This is the first of a series of routine moves. White's knights are not harmoniously arranged, and in his notes to this game in *New In Chess*, Magnus suggests 16 h4 or 16 ♘f3 as decent alternatives to the text-move, securing the knights. However, the surprising prophylactic move 16 ♕c1! is perhaps best, as pointed out by Bent Larsen in *Skakbladet*. The point is that 16...d5?! 17 cxd5 ♖xd5 18 ♖xd5 ♕xd5 19 f3 is unpleasant for Black, and after 16...♘c7 White has 17 ♘h3, intending to transfer the knight to f4. In that case White may be able to claim an edge.

16...♘c7 17 ♘f3 f5! 18 ♘c3 g5! *(D)*

With his last two moves, Black changes the flow of the position and strives for the initiative. However, as Carlsen explains in his notes, this is not really an aggressive advance, more a space-grabbing positional one. After all, this is a *strategic* position, not a tactical one!

W



19 ♕d2 g4 20 ♘e1 ♗g5 21 e3 ♖ff7!

Prophylaxis – by overprotecting the rook on d7, Black avoids any tricks based on ♘a4 and c5. For example, 21...h5?! is premature because of 22 ♘a4 ♘e8 23 c5!.

While the position is probably still about even, Black has the momentum – he is the one who has improved his position over the past few moves, whereas White has merely manoeuvred slowly on the back ranks. Furthermore, Black has good long-term prospects – the weaknesses of the light squares in White's kingside are of an enduring nature.

22 ♔g1?!

This solid move takes the king off a light square, but is also passive. Larsen recommends 22 ♘a4 to develop some queenside activity.

22...♘e8!

Transferring the knight to the nice central square e4.

23 ♘e2 ♘f6 24 ♘f4 ♕e8 25 ♕c3

White could consider chopping off the knight by 25 ♗xf6, but it is a concession to exchange the powerful bishop.

25...♖g7 26 b4 ♘e4 27 ♕b3 ♖ge7 28 ♕a4?!

Kramnik continues to drift – better was 28 h4!, as suggested by Nigel Short during the subsequent press conference. In that case the position would still be about equal.

28...♘e5 *(D)*

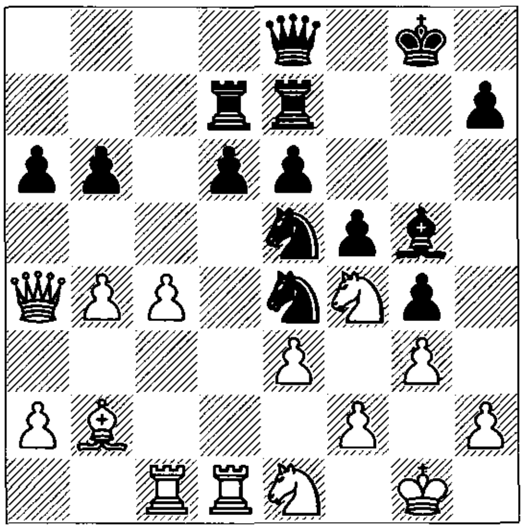
29 ♕xa6?

The first real mistake in the game, and that is all Carlsen needs! The text-move is based on a simple oversight and leaves White with a difficult position. White should retract the previous inaccuracy by 29 ♕b3.

29...♖a7 30 ♕b5

Probably played with a heavy heart; Kramnik must have missed that after 30 ♕xb6 ♖eb7

W



31 ♕d4 ♗f6!, he loses material, as the queen has no good squares. The text-move was accompanied by a draw offer, but by now Black's position is simply too good, so I presume it was easy for Magnus to resist the temptation of accepting.

30...♕xb5 31 cxb5 ♖xa2 32 ♖c8+ ♔f7 33 ♘fd3 ♗f6 34 ♘xe5+

34 ♗xe5 dxe5 35 ♖c6 ♘g5! is a disaster for White; Black penetrates on the chronically weak light squares after 36...e4.

34...dxe5 35 ♖c2 ♖ea7 36 ♔g2 ♘g5!

Eyeing the weak light squares in White's camp.

37 ♖d6?!

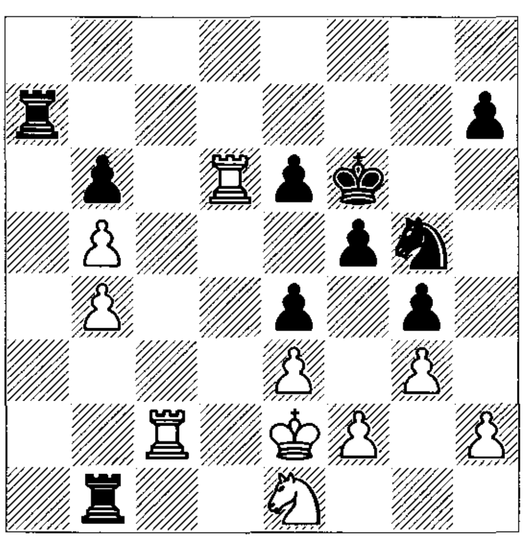
This leads nowhere, but it is hard to suggest anything better for White.

37...e4! 38 ♗xf6 ♔xf6 39 ♔f1

39 ♖xb6? loses immediately: 39...♖a1 40 ♖e2 ♘f3.

39...♖a1 40 ♔e2 ♖b1 *(D)*

W



The time-control has been reached, and White's position is a mess. After 41 ♖xb6 Black has the pleasant choice between the human 41...♖aa1, after which White must give up a piece by 42 ♔d2 to avoid mate (42 ♘g2? ♘f3 followed by 43...♖e1+), or the computer move 41...♖d7!, which prevents the king from escaping and leads to mate after 42...♖dd1.

41 ♖d1 ♖xb4 42 ♘g2 ♖xb5

Two pawns down and passive pieces – the rest is superfluous.

43 ♘f4 ♖c5 44 ♖b2 b5 45 ♔f1 ♖ac7 46 ♖bb1 ♖b7 47 ♖b4 ♖c4 48 ♖b2 b4 49 ♖db1 ♘f3 50 ♔g2 ♖d7! 51 h3

51 ♖xb4 loses to 51...♖xb4 52 ♖xb4 ♖d1 53 ♘e2 ♘e1+ 54 ♔f1 ♘d3+ and 55...♘xb4.

51...e5 52 ♘e2 ♖d2 53 hxg4 fxg4 54 ♖xd2 ♘xd2 55 ♖b2 ♘f3 56 ♔f1 b3! 57 ♔g2 ♖c2! 0-1

Pragmatism Regarding Colour

For decades, many of the top chess-players have adopted a colour strategy based on pressing with White and 'blocking' with Black. And it is true that statistically White has an edge, scoring something like 54% in games between peers. Some pursue this strategy more systematically than others – as I discussed earlier, since his match with Kasparov in 2000 Kramnik has perfected it to the degree that he could go for years with only draws and a few losses as Black, while being spectacularly successful as White. It hardly matters who sits on the other side of the board – Kramnik will stick to his strategy. Others use it more as a general guideline, but are ready to adapt to the circumstances.

Both versions have proven to be successful in the past. However, I believe that the basic strategy of emphasizing colour so much will be inadequate in the future. Coming generations will look for chances with both colours. This is a logical consequence of the three traits of future chess that I have already discussed. As Magnus Carlsen showed in the games against Topalov and Kramnik, adapting to the man (as in the Topalov game) or adopting a strategically complex opening, in which the hostilities are postponed to the middlegame rather than in the opening (as in the Kramnik game), will allow you to play as confidently for a win with Black as with White. In fact, sometimes it is even more likely to win as Black, because many

players are now so skilled and experienced at blocking with Black. In that case it may be a good strategy to play relatively solidly as White, aiming just for a small pull, and then instead try to ambush the opponent as Black. It seems that was Anand's strategy against Kramnik, and it worked wonders!

Of the young up-and-coming players, Sergei Kariakin – just as Magnus Carlsen born in 1990 and continuously battling with the Norwegian over the unofficial title as the greatest hope for the future – seems to have adopted the strategy of playing relatively solidly as White, and more sharply as Black. The Ukrainian got his final breakthrough when he won the 2009 Wijk aan Zee tournament ahead of stars such as Aronian, Radjabov, Carlsen, Ivanchuk, Morozevich, Kamsky and others. That fine tournament victory was secured through a dramatic win in the final round, when no fewer than six players were tied for first: Carlsen, Kariakin, Aronian, Radjabov, Movsesian and Dominguez. Kariakin was the only one to win his game, by taking calculated risks as Black in his encounter with the Cuban Dominguez.

L. Dominguez – Kariakin

Wijk aan Zee 2009

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6

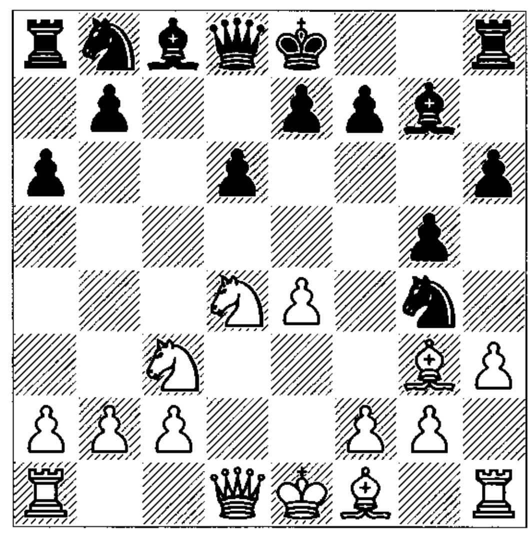
The sharp Najdorf Variation – named after the famed Don Miguel – has been a faithful companion of World Champions like Fischer and Kasparov. And yet, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, I predict that such sharp Sicilians will eventually disappear from tournament practice. That's because with increasingly strong and powerful analysis engines, such sharp lines will eventually be solved – that is, it will become apparent whether the line is really sound for Black (after which White will try to avoid it; e.g., by adopting the more strategic 1 d4) or whether it is too dangerous for Black against a well-prepared opponent (after which *Black* will forego it). Probably the day where the Najdorf is considered theoretically solved is not yet 'just around the corner', but it will come. For now, however, it is an excellent choice by Kariakin. To secure at least a tie for first place, he would have to win (as would Dominguez), and this line is of a nature that allows Black to play for a win. As we shall see in the game, Dominguez does in fact overreach.

6 ♗e3 ♘g4 7 ♗c1

A brief repetition of moves to gain a little time on the clock and also to check Black's intentions.

7...♘f6 8 ♗e3 ♘g4 9 ♗g5 h6 10 ♗h4 g5 11 ♗g3 ♗g7 12 h3 *(D)*

B



12...♘f6!?

The sharpest, but also somewhat risky. That is in fact an apt description of Kariakin's strategy as Black – calculated risk! The alternative here is 12...♘e5, but this has been under a cloud since the game Svidler-Grishchuk, World Ch, Mexico City 2007, where White was better and eventually won after 11 ♘f5 (White did not repeat moves in that game) 11...♗xf5 12 exf5 ♘bc6 13 ♘d5 e6 14 fxe6 fxe6 15 ♘e3 ♕a5+ 16 c3 ♘f3+!? 17 ♕xf3 ♗xc3+ 18 ♔d1 ♕a4+ 19 ♘c2 ♗xb2 20 ♖c1! ♗xc1 21 ♕f6! ♔d7 22 ♔xc1. White may also choose the quieter 11 f3, when Kariakin-Grishchuk, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2007 (again without repetition), led to a slightly better endgame for White after 11...♘bc6 12 ♗f2 ♘g6 13 ♕d2 ♕a5 14 ♘d5 ♕xd2+ 15 ♔xd2 ♗xd4 16 ♗xd4 ♘xd4 17 ♘c7+ ♔d7 18 ♘xa8 ♔c6 19 a4! ♗e6 20 ♖a3! ♖xa8 21 ♖d3 ♔c5 22 b4+ ♔xb4 23 ♖xd4+ ♔c5 24 ♖d3, and the young Ukrainian eventually converted his small material advantage into victory.

13 ♕e2!?

A sharp continuation. 13 ♗c4 is more common, but Dominguez prepares to castle queenside as quickly as possible.

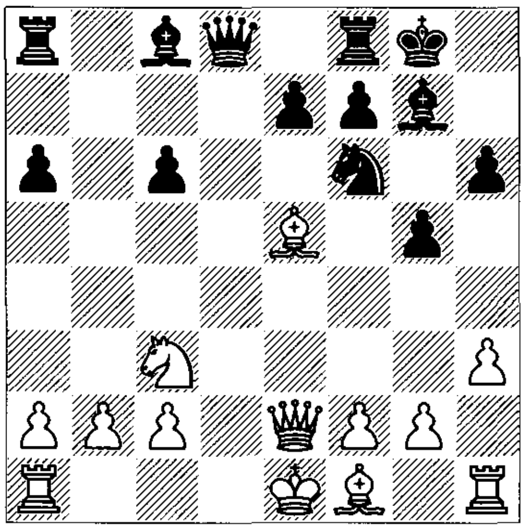
13...♘c6!?

In order not to be crushed, Black has to look for counterplay fast. The text-move gains time

but allows White to wreck Black's pawn-structure in the centre.

14 ♘xc6 bxc6 15 e5! dxe5 16 ♗xe5 0-0 *(D)*

W



17 g4!

This position looks very dangerous for Black – and it is. White intends to tear open Black's kingside by 18 h4. Objectively I am sure White is better here. However, the position is chaotic, with both sides needing to be very accurate, and I am sure that this calculated risk was part of Kariakin's game plan. In the future we shall see many players who play more sharply with Black than with White! The text-move is a novelty, and much more dangerous for Black than 17 h4 g4 18 g3 ♕b6 19 0-0-0 ♗e6 20 ♗g2 ♖fd8, when Black had sufficient counterplay in Ponomariov-J.Polgar, Benidorm 2002.

17...a5 18 h4!

Dominguez plays this part of the game excellently. Black is walking a tightrope to stay alive.

18...♗xg4 19 f3 ♗f5 20 hxg5 hxg5 21 ♕e3! a4

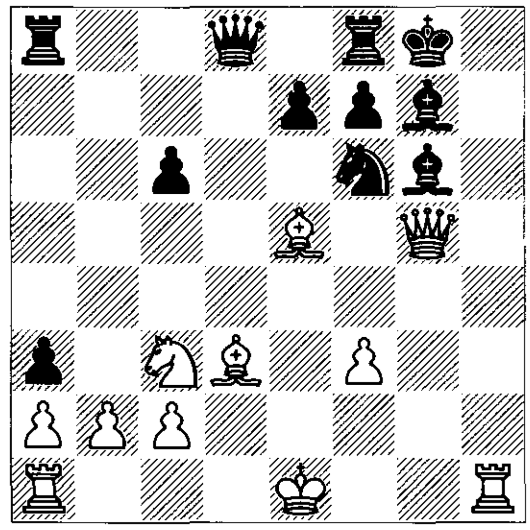
It is impossible to hang on to the extra pawn. 21...♗xc2? is punished by a nice line indicated by Shipov: 22 ♕xg5 ♗g6 23 ♖d1 ♕c8 24 ♗h3 ♕b7 25 ♗e6! fxe6 26 ♕xg6 ♕xb2 27 f4! (not 27 ♖d2? ♕a1+!) 27...♖f7 28 ♖d2 ♕c1+ 29 ♘d1 ♔f8 30 ♖dh2 ♘g8 31 ♖h8 ♖d8 32 ♖xg8+! ♔xg8 33 ♕h7+ ♔f8 34 ♕h8+ ♗xh8 35 ♖xh8#. The attempt to defend the g5-pawn by 21...♘h7? loses immediately to 22 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 23 ♕e5+ ♔g6 24 ♖xh7.

22 ♕xg5 ♗g6 23 ♗d3 a3!? *(D)*

The point of the 21st move. Black does his utmost to distract White before the attack on the kingside crashes through.

24 b4?!

W



White misses a golden opportunity. Correct was 24 0-0-0! axb2+ 25 ♔b1, hiding behind the enemy pawn. In that case it is hard to find a good defence for Black. Shipov gives the line 25...♕a5 26 ♗c4 e6 27 f4 ♘d5 (27...♘h7 is met by 28 ♖xh7!) 28 ♘xd5 cxd5 29 ♗xg7 dxc4 30 ♕xa5 ♖xa5 31 ♗c3, and White wins. This line would have secured Dominguez first place in the traditional Wijk aan Zee tournament!

24...♕b6 25 ♖h4?

A natural move, but missing a second win. Shipov gives 25 ♔e2! as the right move and continues with 25...♕xb4 26 ♖ab1 ♕c5 27 f4 ♖ad8 28 ♗xf6 ♕xg5 29 ♗xg5 ♖xd3 (what else? The threat was 30 f5) 30 cxd3 ♗xc3, when White should eventually win.

25...♘h7!

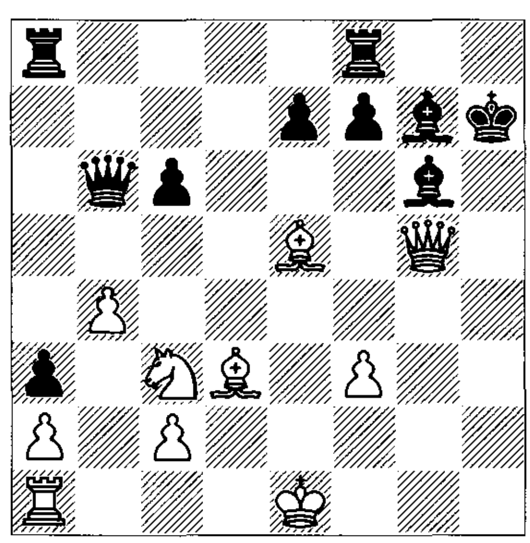
Suddenly the white forces are somewhat lacking coordination. Still, with correct play by both sides a draw should be the normal result – but in such high-stakes games there is no such thing as 'normal'!

26 ♖xh7

Forced; 26 ♕f4? ♗xe5 27 ♕xe5 ♕g1+ 28 ♗f1 ♖ad8 hands Black the initiative.

26...♔xh7 *(D)*

W



27 0-0-0?

White falters for the third time, and now he is in trouble. With 27 ♔d2! ♗xe5 28 ♖h1+ ♔g7 29 ♗xg6 ♗xc3+ 30 ♔xc3 fxg6 31 ♕e5+ ♖f6 32 ♕xe7+ ♖f7 33 ♕e5+ ♖f6 34 ♕e7+ (Shipov), he could have forced a repetition of moves.

27...♕xb4!

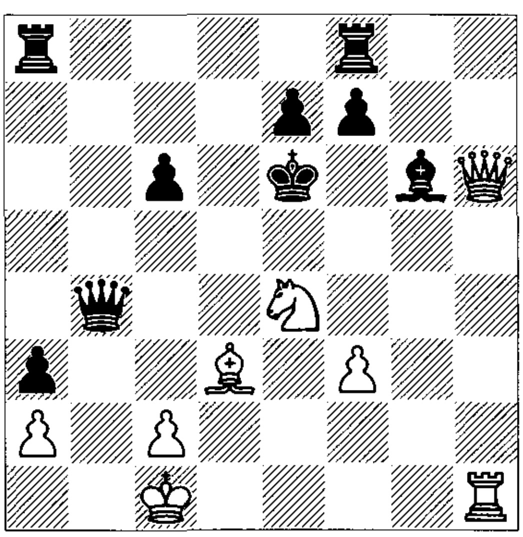
Kariakin plays this part of the game perfectly and with no fear. He has judged that White's attack is by now inadequate – the black king escapes.

28 ♖h1+ ♔g8 29 ♗xg7

29 ♗xg6 is also insufficient after 29...fxg6 30 ♕xg6 ♖f6 31 ♕h7+ (31 ♗xf6? fails to 31...♕f4+! 32 ♔b1 ♖b8+ 33 ♔a1 ♕xf6, winning) 31...♔f8 32 ♘e4 ♖d8 33 f4 (after 33 ♘xf6? ♕d2+ 34 ♔b1 ♕d1+! or 33 ♗xf6? exf6! Black wins) 33...♗h6 34 ♕h8+ ♔f7 35 ♘g5+ ♗xg5 36 ♕h5+ ♖g6 37 fxg5 ♕d2+ 38 ♔b1 ♕xg5, and Black should win.

29...♔xg7 30 ♕h6+ ♔f6 31 ♘e4+ ♔e6 *(D)*

W



It still looks scary, but White has no way to get at Black's king, and by now he has invested too much material in the attack.

32 ♖d1

32 ♕h3+ is calmly met by 32...f5.

32...♕b2+ 33 ♔d2 ♔d7 34 ♕f4 ♖fd8 35 ♔e2 ♔e8 36 ♖h1 ♖a5 37 ♕c7 ♖ad5 38 ♔e3 ♔f8 39 c3!?

A last attempt: White blocks the black queen from h8.

39...♖xd3+ 40 ♔f4 f6! 41 ♖h8+ ♔f7 0-1

42 ♖xd8 loses to 42...♕h2+.

This dramatic game could have gone either way. Was Kariakin lucky? Yes, perhaps, but that is part of the strategy of playing aggressively as Black. You take risks knowing that it might go wrong. However, if you are willing to take such calculated risks, you are often rewarded. I predict this is a trend we shall increasingly see in the future, because if you keep adopting the 'block as Black' strategy, it is for certain that you will *not* win. Then you just allow your opponent a free shot at the goal, and with the opponent being backed by a powerful computer in preparation, showing him all kinds of tactical tricks, that might be a bigger risk than playing actively, fighting for the initiative.

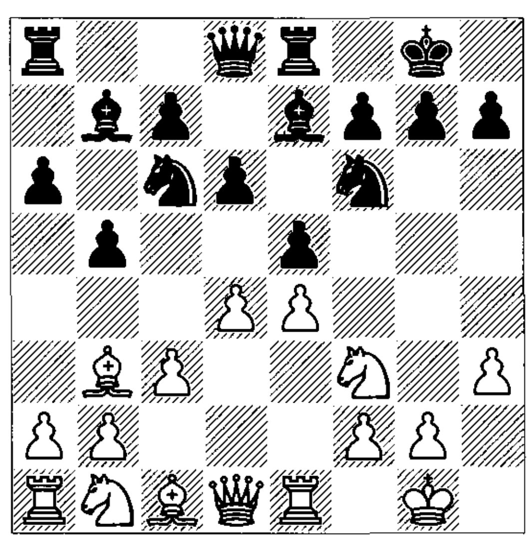
It is interesting that as White, Kariakin takes fewer risks. While his wins as Black are frequently tactical, his white wins are often positional masterpieces. As White, he prefers to play for a slight pull which he then patiently nurses. Some of the best players in the world have fallen victim to this strategy. As with Magnus Carlsen, it is impressive how maturely Kariakin handles even simple positions. In some ways, Kariakin reminds me of Fischer – sharp, tactical Najdorfs as Black and strategic Ruy Lopezes as White. Here is a fine Ruy Lopez effort against one of the greatest experts on that opening.

Kariakin – Beliavsky

Amsterdam 2007

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 ♗b7 10 d4 ♖e8 *(D)*

W



11 a4!?

A rare move in this well-known position. The usual move is 11 ♘bd2, but Kariakin has another idea.

11...♗f8

A few rounds earlier Nikolic played 11...♕c8 against Kariakin, but after 12 ♘g5 ♘d8 13 ♗c2 ♗f8 14 ♘d2 c6 15 b4 ♘e6 16 ♘b3 ♘d7 17

♘a5 ♘xg5 18 ♗xg5 ♕c7 19 ♘xb7 ♕xb7 20 ♗b3 the young prodigy had a solid advantage based on the two bishops, and he duly won.

12 ♗g5!?

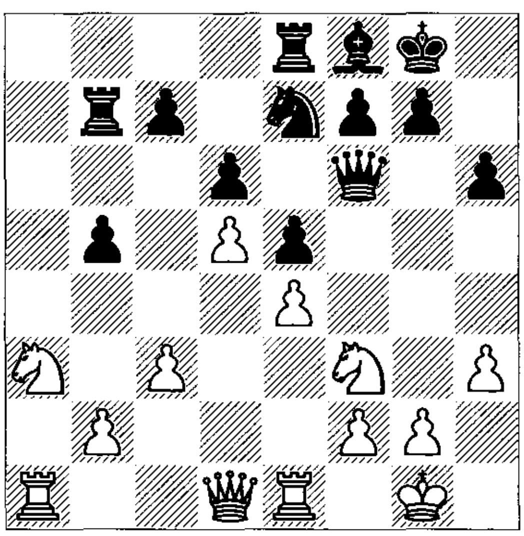
12 ♘bd2 transposes to well-known lines, whereas the text-move had only been played a few times before. One of these games was Shirov-Piket, Amber Blindfold, Monaco 1996, which went 12...♘a5 13 axb5 axb5 14 ♖xa5!? ♖xa5 15 dxe5 dxe5 16 ♕xd8 ♖xd8 17 ♘xe5 ♗xe4 18 ♘xf7 ♗d5 19 ♘xd8 ♗xb3 20 ♘d2 ♗d5 21 ♗xf6 gxf6 22 ♘e4 ♖a6 23 b4 with an edge for White but an eventual draw. Beliavsky's choice is safer.

12...h6 13 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 14 ♗d5 ♖ab8 15 axb5 axb5 16 ♘a3 ♘e7

16...b4?! looks natural, but in fact this is a mistake that meets with a tactical rejoinder after 17 ♘c4 bxc3 18 bxc3 exd4? 19 ♕a4!, and White wins a piece, as pointed out by Kariakin.

17 ♗xb7 ♖xb7 18 d5 *(D)*

B



White has emerged from the opening with a slight edge. The bishop on f8 is passive, and after an eventual ...c6 – more or less forced if Black is to obtain some play – White obtains a good square on d5. Kariakin is very fond of playing positions with such a potential dream square for a knight. He has won several fine positional games in which the defining theme was a white knight on d5 vs a weak dark-squared bishop. Inquisitive readers may wish to study his games against Mamedyarov from Wijk aan Zee 2006 and Shirov, European Team Ch, Khersonisos 2007. Very instructive stuff!

18...♖eb8 19 ♘c2 c6

There it is. Otherwise White would prevent this liberating thrust by 20 ♘b4.

20 dxc6 ♘xc6 21 ♘e3 ♕e6 22 ♕d3 ♕d7 23 ♖ed1?!

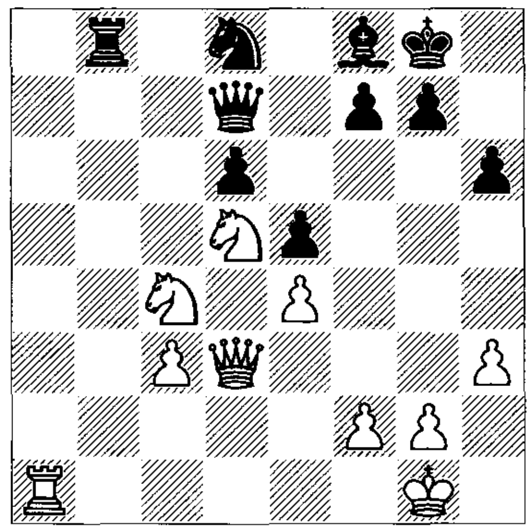
As Kariakin points out in his notes in *New In Chess*, here or on the next move it was more accurate to play b4 to fix the black pawn on b5.

23...♖a7 24 ♘d5?! b4!

Beliavsky takes the opportunity to get rid of this potential weakness.

25 ♘d2 bxc3 26 bxc3 ♖xa1 27 ♖xa1 ♘d8 28 ♘c4 *(D)*

B



White's systematic manoeuvres has helped him obtain a solid advantage. However, the win is still far off, as Black only has one real weakness, the pawn on d6. It is necessary to create more weaknesses, and this is what Kariakin sets out to do. For a start, he manoeuvres patiently to see if his opponent will help him in that respect – White's positional advantage is stable, so there is no need to hurry.

28...♕b5 29 ♖a5 ♕b7 30 ♖a4 ♘e6 31 ♖b4 ♕a7 32 g3!

Gradually strengthening the position.

32...♖a8 33 ♔g2 ♕a1 34 ♘cb6 ♘c5 35 ♕f3 ♖d8?!

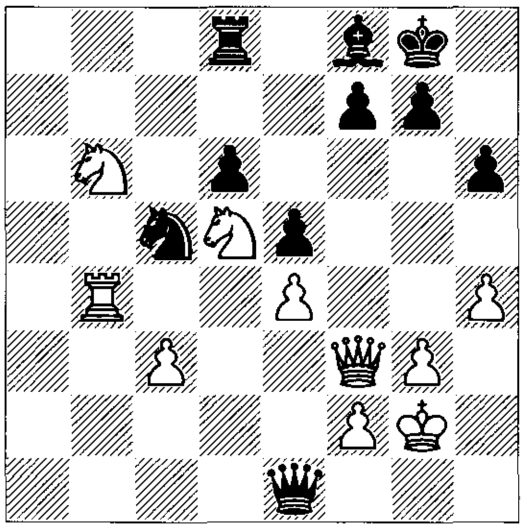
A natural move, but Kariakin points out that this is too passive. It was better to keep the rook on the open file by 35...♖a7, since 36 ♘c8 ♖a8 37 ♘ce7+ ♗xe7 38 ♘xe7+ ♔f8 39 ♘f5 gets White nowhere after 39...♕a6 (Kariakin).

36 h4 ♕e1? *(D)*

Kariakin labels this the decisive mistake. Black allows a favourable exchange of knights, which in the process saddles him with another weakness: it turns out to be difficult for Black to cover his first two ranks. Beliavsky probably trusted in the forthcoming counterattack on White's back rank, but it comes to nothing.

37 ♘a4!

W



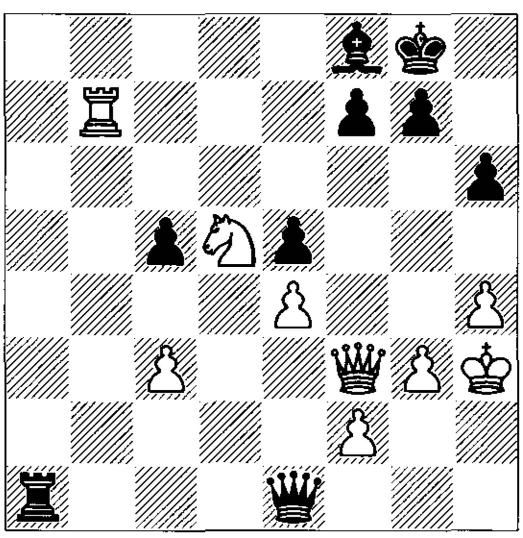
White has two knights which are competing for one square (d5). That is the theme that the Russian coach Mark Dvoretsky – widely regarded as the world's premier chess trainer – terms 'the superfluous piece'. Thus it is to White's advantage to exchange it for Black's knight!

37...♖a8 38 ♘xc5 ♖a1

This was Beliavsky's idea, but White's king easily escapes.

39 ♔h3! dxc5 40 ♖b7! *(D)*

B



40...♕h1+

A sad necessity. After 40...♕f1+? 41 ♔g4 Black cannot defend f7. However, the endgame is lost due to the bad bishop and the weak pawns, and just like his Norwegian rival, Kariakin is in possession of excellent technique.

41 ♕xh1 ♖xh1+ 42 ♔g2 ♖a1 43 ♖b8 g6

43...f6 is met by 44 h5!, after which White's king penetrates on the light squares.

44 ♖e8!

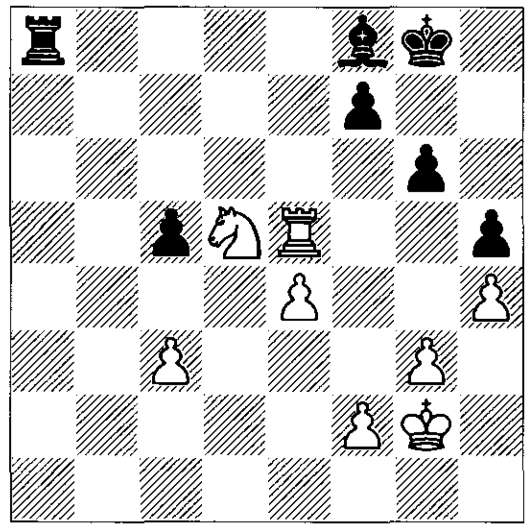
White wins a decisive pawn.

44...h5 45 ♖xe5 ♖a8 *(D)*

46 ♖e8! ♖a7

46...♖xe8 47 ♘f6+ is hopeless for Black, but so is this.

W



47 e5 ♔g7 48 ♔f3 c4 49 ♖c8 ♖a5 50 ♖d8 ♗c5 51 ♘f6 ♗e7 52 ♖g8+ ♔h6 53 ♔e4 ♗xf6 54 exf6 ♔h7

The pawn ending after 54...g5 55 hxg5+ ♖xg5 56 ♖xg5 ♔xg5 is lost for Black after 57 ♔e5 ♔g4 58 ♔d6 – White is faster.

55 ♖g7+ ♔h6 56 ♖xf7 ♖a2 57 f4 1-0

Courage, Resourcefulness and Inventiveness

As I have argued above, sometimes you will need to be willing to take some calculated risks to succeed in the chess world of the future. Therefore psychological traits like *courage*, *resourcefulness* and *inventiveness* are of utmost importance. Courage in order to accept the inherent risks associated with this approach, and resourcefulness and inventiveness to overcome obstacles, if things do not go your way – just as Kariakin did in the game against Dominguez above. Here is a game in which Carlsen sacrifices two pawns for at best questionable compensation – a courageous decision, and it succeeds!

Carlsen – Aronian

Bilbao 2008

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 e3 ♘bd7 6 ♗d3 dxc4

In a recent issue of *Skakbladet*, Bent Larsen suggested that the rare 6...a5!? might even be Black's best option here. His ideas are 7 e4?! dxe4 8 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 9 ♗xe4 ♗b4+ with good play for Black, 7 b3 ♗b4 8 ♗d2 ♕e7 with equality, or 7 0-0 dxc4 8 ♗xc4 and now either

8...♗d6, 8...♗e7 or 8...♕c7. Anyone interested?

7 ♗xc4 b5 8 ♗d3 ♗b7 9 a3

For years 9 0-0 or 9 e4 was considered almost mandatory here, but these lines have been very extensively examined; the latter in particular is more or less 'solved', with Black considered fine. Therefore White has looked in other directions in the search for an opening advantage in this line of the Meran.

9...b4 10 ♘e4 ♘xe4 11 ♗xe4 bxa3 12 0-0!?

A temporary pawn sacrifice, hoping to exploit Black's sluggish development and his scattered queenside pawns.

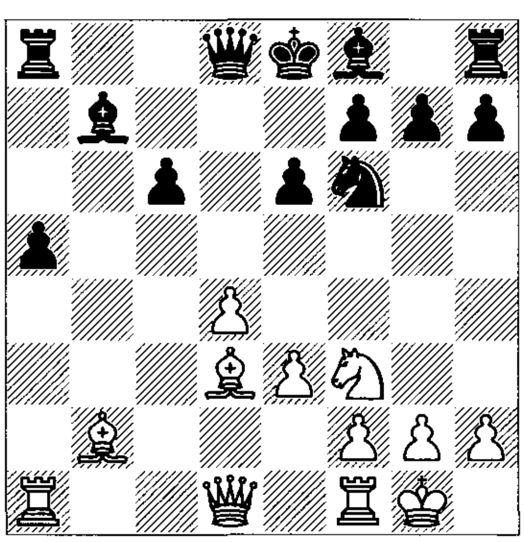
12...♘f6

An important alternative is 12...♗d6.

13 ♗d3 axb2 14 ♗xb2 a5 *(D)*

This is currently considered Black's best, but is not his only option. After 14...♗b4 15 ♕b3 a5 16 ♗a3 ♕b6 17 ♘e5 0-0 18 ♘c4 ♕c7 19 ♗xb4 axb4 20 ♕xb4, the meek 20...♖fd8? 21 ♘e5 g6 22 ♖xa8 ♖xa8 23 ♖c1 gave White a clear positional advantage in Moiseenko-Khuzman, Montreal 2008, but the typical liberating thrust 20...c5! is much better. Khuzman may have feared 21 dxc5 (21 ♕xc5 ♕xc5 22 dxc5 ♘d7 23 ♖xa8 ♗xa8 equalizes) 21...♘d7 22 ♖ac1 ♘xc5 23 ♘d2, when the pin down the c-file appears difficult to break at first sight, as 23...♘xd3? loses to 24 ♕xf8+! ♔xf8 25 ♖xc7 while 23...♕d6? 24 ♗xh7+! ♔xh7 25 ♖xc5 leaves Black in deep trouble. However, Black has 23...♕a5 (the computer-move 23...♖fc8 is also possible), when after 24 ♕xc5 ♕xd2 he should be able to draw without too much trouble.

W



Now Carlsen uncorks a courageous second pawn sacrifice – I doubt that it is correct, but it sets Black new problems and proves to be the right choice for the occasion. And remember: Carlsen is one of the players that will carry chess into the Era of Transformation, in which 'contextual chess' will be the order of the day!

15 d5?!

I struggled to decide which evaluation I should attach to this fantastic move. I stick with the 'objective' one – presumably the move is not correct, but it is in the spirit of the era into which we are about to enter. By the way, White has two decent alternatives:

a) 15 ♕a4 led to a mini-advantage for White after 15...♗b4 16 ♗a3 ♘d5 17 e4 ♘b6 18 ♕b3 ♕e7 19 ♖ab1 ♗xa3 20 ♕xb6 ♗b4 21 ♘e1! 0-0 22 ♘c2 in Gelfand-Kramnik, World Ch, Mexico City 2007, but soon petered out to a draw.

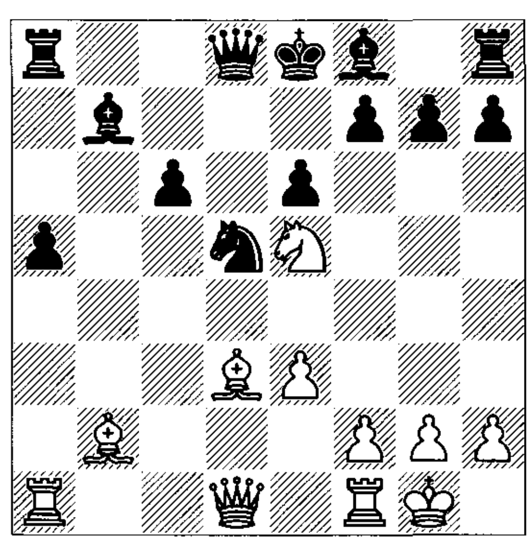
b) 15 e4!? seems more promising, and soon gave White a winning position in Moiseenko-Illescas, Spanish Team Ch, Cala Mayor 2008 after 15...♗b4 16 ♕c2 ♘d7 17 ♖fd1 ♖c8 18 ♕b1 0-0 19 d5!? cxd5 (the cool 19...exd5 20 exd5 g6! seems OK for Black; I don't see a clear way for White to exploit the weakened a1-h8 diagonal) 20 exd5 ♘f6? (Black should try 20...♗xd5 21 ♗xh7+ ♔h8 with complications) 21 dxe6 ♕e7 22 ♘g5 h6? 23 ♗h7+ ♔h8 24 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 25 ♘xf7+ ♖xf7 26 exf7 ♕xf7 27 ♗e4.

15...♘xd5

An obvious choice, although it is not clear that there is anything wrong with 15...exd5. After 16 ♘d4 White certainly has some play, but is it worth two pawns after, e.g., 16...♗c5?

16 ♘e5 *(D)*

B



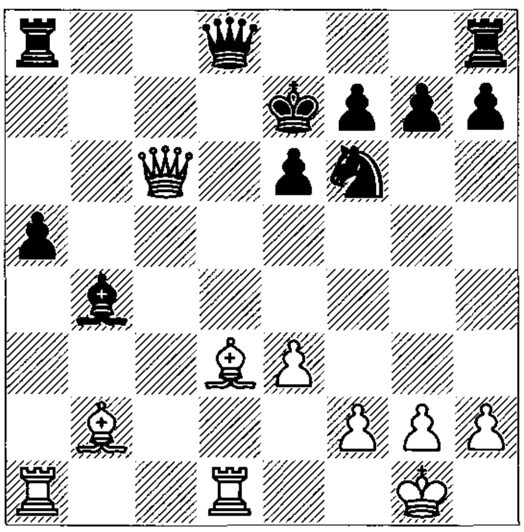
16...♘f6?!

I agree with Bent Larsen, who criticizes this move for being illogical – why move the knight

away from the centre voluntarily? According to Larsen, Black had two strong alternatives. One is the logical developing move 16...♗b4, when 17 ♕a4 may be answered with 17...♘e7, while 17 ♕g4 is met by 17...♕f6. However, the other option, 16...♕c7!, is probably best. This prophylactic move simultaneously covers b7, c6 and f7, while hitting the knight on e5 and keeping all options open. After 17 ♕a4 Black hits the knight by 17...♗d6, and 17 ♖c1 may be met by 17...a4 18 ♕h5 ♖a5!. I don't see sufficient compensation for White in these lines.

17 ♕a4 ♗b4 18 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 19 ♕xc6+ ♔e7 20 ♖fd1 *(D)*

B



Now it is just one pawn, and with the two powerful bishops and Black's king stuck in the centre, White has definite compensation. However, he is not necessarily better yet.

20...♖c8 21 ♕f3 ♕b6 22 ♗d4 ♕b8 23 ♗a6 ♖cd8 24 ♗b7!

Tying Black up.

24...h5 25 h3 h4?!

This just jeopardizes the pawn. The direct 25...e5 seems more natural, although I prefer White after 26 ♗b6 ♖xd1+ 27 ♖xd1. It is difficult for Black to shake off White's pressure.

26 ♖ab1 e5 *(D)*

27 ♖xb4! axb4?

This loses immediately. The only chance was 27...exd4 28 ♖bxd4 ♕c7, and even if White is clearly better here, it is still a game.

28 ♗c5+ ♔e6

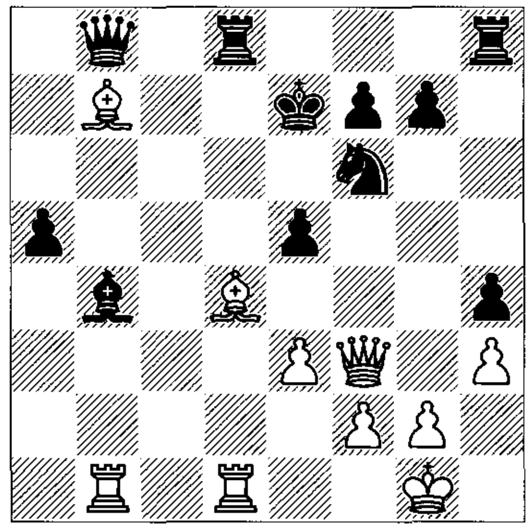
28...♔e8 29 ♗c6+ ♘d7 30 ♕f5 ♕c7 31 ♕g5! mates.

29 ♖a1!

Ouch! Aronian must have missed this simple move – Black is utterly lost.

29...♖d6

W



Resignation was the other option.

30 ♗xd6 ♔xd6

30...♕xd6 31 ♖a6.

31 ♕c6+ ♔e7 32 ♖a8!

The final touch.

32...♕d6 33 ♕xd6+ ♔xd6 34 ♖xh8 b3 35 ♗a6 ♘d7 36 ♖xh4 ♘c5 1-0

Like in some of the previous games we have seen – those against Topalov and Kramnik – Magnus makes the win seem effortless. However, notice that the means of obtaining these three wins against some of the best players in the world differ fundamentally: a clever opening choice against Topalov, a fine strategic middlegame against Kramnik, and a tactical skirmish against Aronian. That is why I call the future of chess the Era of Transformation!

Energy and Stamina

Chess is increasingly becoming a young man's game. There are several reasons for this. The most important one is the invention of computer tools like databases and analysis engines. Computers facilitate the learning process so that young talents can much more quickly absorb the lessons of chess history. Nobel laureate Herbert Simon claimed a few decades ago that to become an expert in a field you need 10 years of serious study and practice. Nowadays the road to expert level is much shorter (at least in a knowledge game like chess, but I presume that the same is true for other fields as well), as the rising numbers of teenage grandmasters testify. That is a development that will speed up, not decline. In my youth, that is the 1980s, becoming a GM around the age of 21-22 was normal.

Now there is nothing unusual in grandmasters aged 17-18 or even younger.

But cognitive psychologists don't just have to rewrite the books on the maturing of talents and experts; the reasoning process itself – the way we calculate variations and make decisions in chess – has been altered by the advent of computers. As I discussed in Chapter 6, Creative Concreteness is very much about broadening the search for candidate moves, and this process has been facilitated by computers continuously suggesting 'crazy' possibilities that turn out to be quite strong. As the quote by Anand earlier in this chapter suggests, after working with computers for a while, you automatically start looking for 'crazy possibilities' yourself in your calculations – your search for candidate moves becomes more creative and less rigid. For some of us 'oldies' on the grandmaster circuit, the process of adapting to these new times in chess has been quite cumbersome – I can testify to that – but for the young generation, this is simply what they are used to – they grew up with computers.

There is one more reason why chess in the future will be a young man's game. That's because skills like energy and stamina are becoming increasingly important in chess. While practice and experience will still be valuable – very much so – the demands on the physical condition of the players will continue to rise. I predict that we shall see more and more long games in future chess. Let me explain why. As I have already noted several times, the computer revolution potentially leads to a kind of competitive parity early in the game. Using databases and analysis engines, it is possible for everybody to be very well prepared in the opening. It will be increasingly difficult for the best and most talented players to display their supremacy in this part of the game. Consequently they will have to keep the game going for a long time. If you believe you are better than your opponent, but you cannot really outprepare him in the opening because he too has all the latest opening news in his computer, you should try to outplay him later in the game. The physical ability to play long games day in and day out in tournaments, gradually putting the opponent under pressure, will be a differentiating parameter – energy and stamina are required. Accordingly, mastery in the later stages of the game will be vital. As I pointed out in *Secrets of Chess Endgame Strategy*, I feel that some players emphasize opening preparation too much, at the expense of working on their endgame skills. That's a mistake: while opening preparation is important, it will rarely lead to a competitive advantage over opponents, only competitive parity. On the other hand, the ability to outplay the opponent in long strategic and technical endgames will distinguish the masters of the future.

The two most promising youngsters in chess, Magnus Carlsen and Sergei Kariakin, both possess excellent endgame skills, and at an early stage of their careers they have already shown that they are capable of outlasting much more experienced grandmasters in long games. Let me conclude this book with two examples of this pattern in action.

Carlsen – Bu Xiangzhi
Biel 2007

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e3 g6

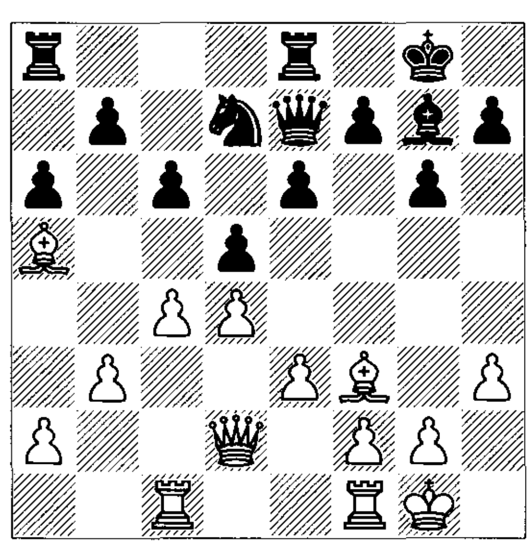
The old Schlechter Variation, named after the Austrian Carl Schlechter, the man who was just a draw away from taking the World Championship title from Emanuel Lasker in 1910. It is a solid but somewhat passive line.

5 ♘f3 ♗g7 6 ♗e2!?

Carlsen decides not to challenge Black in the opening. The main line is 6 ♗d3, preparing an eventual e4 advance.

6...0-0 7 0-0 a6 8 b3 ♘e4 9 ♗b2 ♘xc3 10 ♗xc3 ♗g4 11 h3 ♗xf3 12 ♗xf3 e6 13 ♕d2 ♖e8 14 ♗a5 ♕e7 15 ♖ac1 ♘d7 *(D)*

W

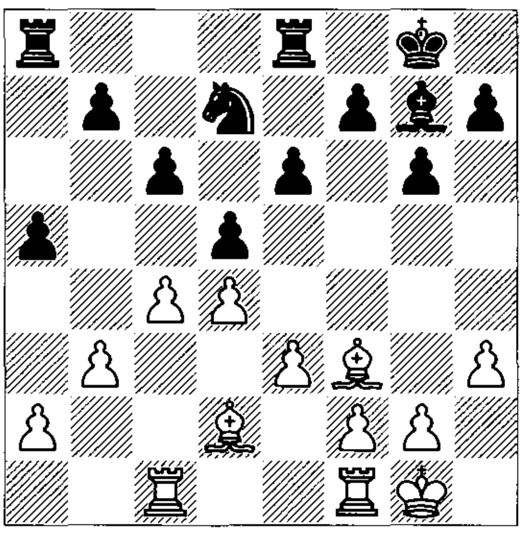


16 ♕b4

Carlsen certainly doesn't win this game in the opening. Apart from the very tiny advantage of the two bishops – not really a very significant issue here given the rather closed and static nature of the position – he has gained absolutely nothing out of the opening. However, that does not mean that you have to relinquish an early draw (as would perhaps have been the case in the 'old days'). Notwithstanding the fact that on the other side of the board is sitting a 2685 grandmaster known for his solidity, Magnus sets out to outplay his opponent in a strategic endgame without queens.

16...♕xb4 17 ♗xb4 a5 18 ♗d2 *(D)*

B



18...dxc4!?

A difficult choice. Bu decides to change the nature of the position. The decision is fine in itself, but in principle slightly risky given that White possesses the two bishops. More prudent moves were 18...a4 or 18...f5, restricting White's bishops. I guess this was just as much a psychological choice as a pure chess choice. One of the advantages of building a reputation as a player who does not mind playing long games is that sometimes the opponent feels a need to force the issue in order to avoid having to defend for hours and hours.

19 bxc4 e5 20 d5 e4!

This was Bu's idea: Black grabs space in the centre and isolates White's d-pawn.

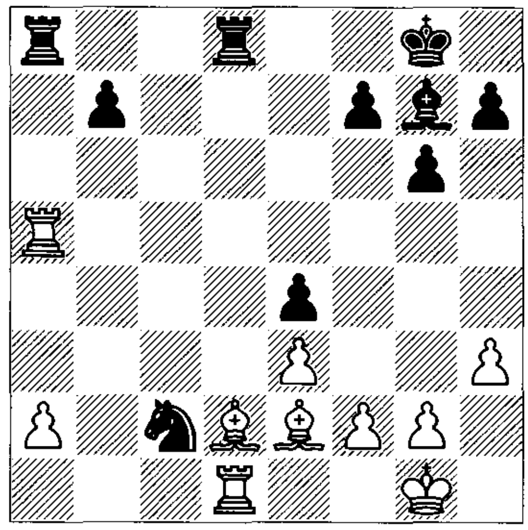
21 ♗e2 ♖ed8 22 ♖fd1 cxd5 23 cxd5 ♘f6 24 ♗e1 ♘xd5

Best – after 24...♖xd5 25 ♖b1 ♖xd1 26 ♗xd1! White wins back his pawn on either a5 or b7 and retains some advantage thanks to the bishops.

25 ♖c5 ♘b4 26 ♖xa5 ♘c2 27 ♗d2 *(D)*

27...♖xa5?!

B



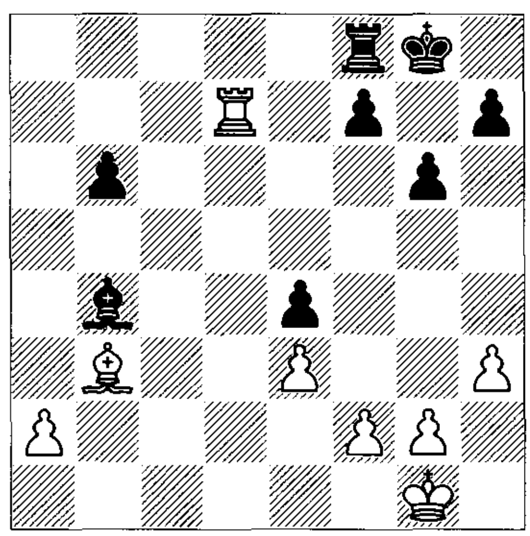
There was no need to rush with this exchange. After a solid waiting move like 27...h5 or 27...♗f6, Black is perfectly OK. White has the two bishops but his pieces are not so well coordinated.

28 ♗xa5 ♖a8 29 ♖d5! ♗f8 30 ♗d1 ♘b4?

Black's first real mistake. Bu underestimates the problems he will face in the coming rook + opposite-coloured bishops ending. Correct was 30...b6!, when Black should hold easily after 31 ♗xc2 ♖xa5! 32 ♖xa5 bxa5 33 ♗xe4, despite being a pawn down. White's best winning chance is 31 ♗xb6, but after 31...♖xa2 Black is close to a draw.

31 ♗xb4 ♗xb4 32 ♗b3 b6 33 ♖d7 ♖f8 *(D)*

W



Despite the opposite-coloured bishops, this ending is not easy for Black. His rook is passive, and the e4-pawn is bound to go. It is striking how quickly Magnus turned an equal position into a close-to-winning one – simply by continuing to play in a position where many grandmasters would have agreed to a draw long ago.

34 g4! g5 35 ♖b7 ♗c5 36 ♗d5 ♔g7 37 ♔f1 h6 38 ♔e2 ♔f6 39 a4 ♔g7 40 ♖c7 ♗b4 41 ♗xe4

After patiently improving his position, Magnus finally relinquishes the pressure on f7 and takes the pawn.

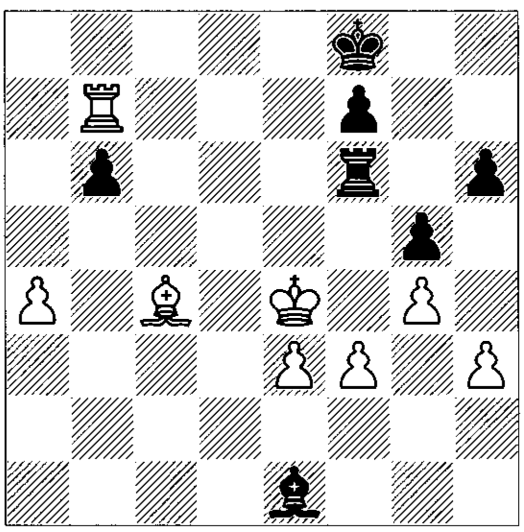
41...♖d8 42 ♗d3 ♔f8 43 ♖b7 ♖d6 44 ♗c4 ♖f6 45 ♗d5 ♗e7 46 f3 ♗b4 47 ♔d3

The next step is now to activate the king and make the f4 advance.

47...♗e1 48 ♔e4 ♗g3 49 ♗c4 ♗e1?! *(D)*

Too obliging. There was no need to allow White the f4 push that easily. It seems that Bu – just as we saw earlier in the game – wants to force action rather than just wait. However, patience is paramount in such positions. Black should just bide his time by, e.g., 49...♔g7, when White would have to manoeuvre slowly to achieve the push, for instance by bringing the bishop to f5.

W

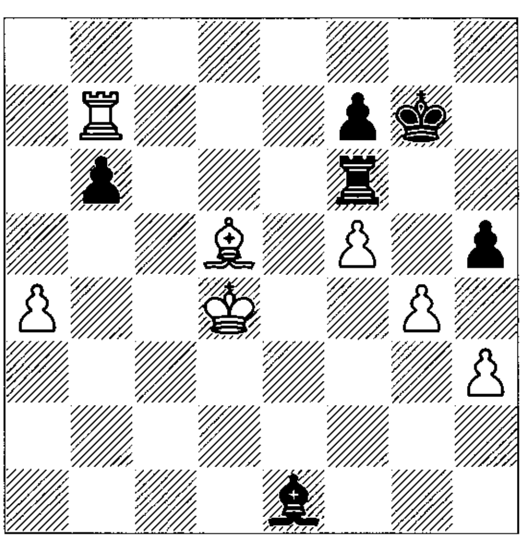


50 f4! gxf4 51 exf4 ♗g3 52 f5!

The problem with allowing 50 f4 is not so much that White's kingside majority becomes more mobile – it is much more problematic that the rook on f6 is now dominated.

52...♗e1 53 ♗d5 ♔g7 54 ♔d4 h5 *(D)*

W



The best chance is to exchange as many pawns as possible.

55 ♔c4 hxg4 56 hxg4 ♗f2 57 ♗e6! ♗e3 58 ♔d5 ♔f8 59 ♔e5 ♔g7 60 ♔e4 ♗d2 61 ♔d3 ♗f4 62 ♔c4

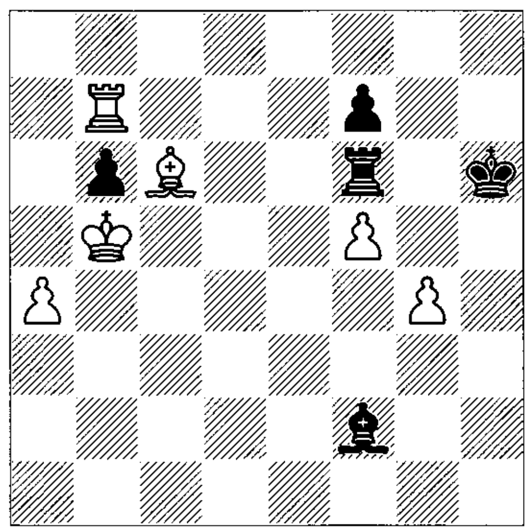
As I discussed in *Secrets of Chess Endgame Strategy*, there is no need to rush in such positions, in which the advantage is stable. Psychologically, it is much more annoying for the opponent to manoeuvre slowly, leaving him in the dark as long as possible.

62...♔f8 63 ♗d5 ♗e3 64 ♔b5!

Finally the contours of Carlsen's plan become visible – by blocking the 6th rank with the bishop, he plans an exchange sacrifice on b6. The suffocating rook on f6 will then have a hard time dealing with the outside passed pawn.

64...♔g7 65 ♗e6 ♔f8 66 ♗c4 ♗f2 67 ♗d5 ♔g7 68 ♗c6! ♔h6 *(D)*

W



69 ♖xb6!

There it is. Now 69...♗xb6 70 ♔xb6 ♔g5 71 a5 ♔xg4 72 a6 ♖h6 73 a7 ♖h8 74 ♗d7! followed by 75 ♔b7 and 76 a8♕ is winning for White.

69...♔g5

This is not much better.

70 a5 ♖d6 71 ♖b7 ♔xg4 72 ♖xf7

With two extra pawns, the win is easy.

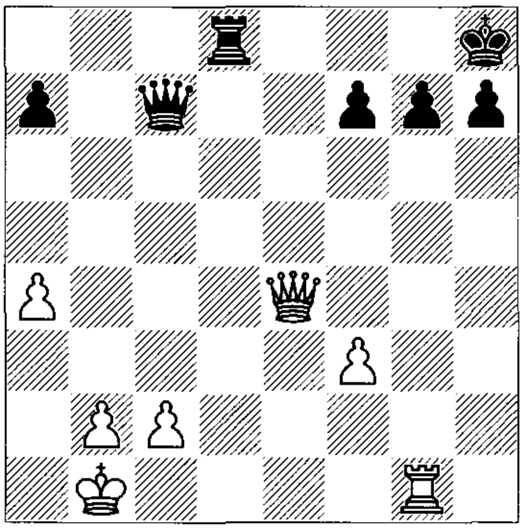
72...♔g5 73 ♖d7! ♖h6 74 ♗e4 ♖h8 75 a6 ♖b8+ 76 ♔c4 ♔f4 77 ♖e7 ♖c8+ 78 ♔d3 ♖d8+ 79 ♔e2 ♗d4 80 ♗d3 ♗c5 81 ♖e6 ♖h8 82 f6 ♖h2+ 83 ♔d1 ♖h6 84 f7! 1-0

A neat tactical shot to finish it off – after 84...♖xe6 85 a7, one of the pawns queens.

The 2009 edition of the traditional Wijk aan Zee tournament was certainly a powerful demonstration of the potential of the young generation. All three round-robin groups were won by teenagers: the A-group by 19-year-old Sergei

Kariakin, the B-group by 16-year-old Fabiano Caruana, and the C-group by the 15-year-old Wesley So. Yes, chess is a young man's game! Let's see how Kariakin wraps up a very important point by a very powerful and energetic performance in the endgame. At this point, Movsesian was leading, with Kariakin and others trailing by half a point.

W



Kariakin – Movsesian
Wijk aan Zee 2009

I turned on my computer around here to follow the game live on ICC, and my first thought was "this must be a draw". Despite the asymmetry of the pawn-structures – which often gives rise to exciting races to promote – I reasoned that it would be difficult for either side to start pushing his pawns, because that would leave their own king vulnerable. Objectively, the position is only slightly better for White, and Black should be able to make a draw. However, Kariakin displays impressive tenacity in the following play. By the way, this was not the first time that these two guys had battled it out in a long game – at the Spanish Team Championship in Lugo 2006, Kariakin managed to grind out a win in an ending that lasted until move 115!

26 ♖g5!

An excellent manoeuvre. The rook is transferred to b5, where it performs several important tasks. It covers the king, supports the advance of the c-pawn, and threatens to infiltrate the seventh rank via b7.

26...g6 27 ♖b5! ♖d1+?!

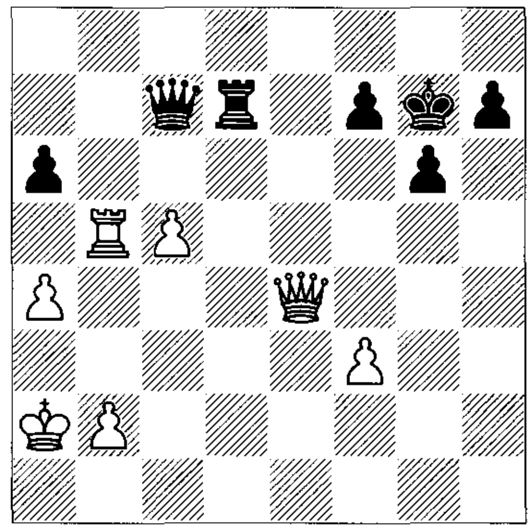
I agree with Shipov when he notes that interpolating this check is inaccurate. If White is going to push his pawns, he would like to have his king close to them rather than left alone on the first rank. Therefore 27...♖d7 seems more prudent. Still, this is just a minor detail that doesn't alter the basic evaluation of the position.

28 ♔a2 ♖d7 29 c4!

The king is safe and White starts pushing the c-pawn, using the b-pawn as shelter. Black, on the other hand, will have to push his h-pawn.

29...♔g7 30 c5 a6 *(D)*

W



31 c6!

White directs the game into a queen ending in which his pawns are farther advanced. While Black may still hold, he has to be accurate. One can't help being impressed by Carlsen and Kariakin's resourcefulness in turning balanced positions into unbalanced – and better – ones.

31...axb5 32 cxd7 ♕xd7 33 ♕e5+ ♔f8

Not bad, but according to Shipov, Black could draw with 33...f6 34 ♕xb5 ♕e6+ 35 b3 h5 36 a5 h4 37 a6 h3 38 a7 h2 39 a8♕ h1♕ 40 ♕bb7+ ♕f7 41 ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 42 ♕d5+ ♔e7 43 b4 ♕h2+ 44 ♔b3 ♕d6!, and Black should be able to hold. Still, the text-move should also be sufficient to draw.

34 axb5

Not, of course, 34 ♕xb5? ♕xb5 35 axb5 ♔e7, and Black wins. Although White now has doubled pawns, he is the one with winning chances, as the b5-pawn is farthest advanced, always a crucial factor in queen endgames.

34...h5 35 ♔b3!

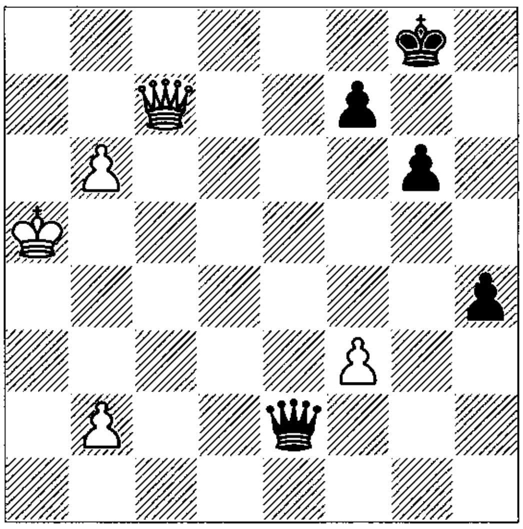
Not 35 b6 ♕a4+ 36 ♔b1 ♕d1+ with a perpetual.

35...♔g8

A tough call. The king hides from checks, so that Black is ready to push the h-pawn, but at the same time any hopes of using the king to battle White's b-pawn are buried.

36 b6 h4 37 ♕c7 ♕d1+ 38 ♔b4 ♕e1+ 39 ♔b5 ♕e2+ 40 ♔a5 *(D)*

B



40...♕d2+?

The notorious move 40! Movsesian was facing a tough Hamlet-like decision: to take or not to take? Apparently he made the wrong choice – Black could have drawn by 40...♕xb2! 41 b7 ♕a3+ 42 ♔b6 ♕b3+! (42...♕b4+? loses to 43 ♔a6 ♕a3+ 44 ♕a5) 43 ♔a7 (after 43 ♔a6 Black has the saving 43...♕d3+! – the key difference between 42...♕b3+! and 42...♕b4+?) 43...♕a3+ 44 ♔b8 h3 45 ♕c8+ ♔g7 46 ♕xh3 ♕d6+ 47 ♔c8 ♕c5+, and White's king cannot escape the checks.

41 b4!

Now White's king can hide behind this pawn.

41...♕a2+ 42 ♔b5 ♕e2+ 43 ♕c4 ♕e8+ 44 ♕c6 ♕e2+ 45 ♔c5 ♕f2+?!

The final inaccuracy. The only chance was 45...♕e3+ 46 ♔d6 ♕f4+ 47 ♔d7 h3 48 b7 h2 49 ♕c8+ ♔g7 50 b8♕ ♕d4+ 51 ♕d6 ♕xd6+ 52 ♔xd6 h1♕, when the odds between a white win or a draw would be 1-1. In the game, Black is lost.

46 ♔d6 ♕g3+ 47 ♔d7 h3 48 b7 h2

Black is in time to queen, but the problem is that White has another b-pawn which is much closer to promotion than Black's f- and g-pawns.

49 ♕c8+ ♔g7 50 b8♕ ♕xb8 51 ♕xb8 h1♕ 52 ♕e5+ ♔g8 53 ♕d5!

Another example of Kariakin's excellent technique. He knows that in queen endings, a centralized queen is a major asset. In connection with the passed b-pawn, this positional advantage carries the day.

53...♕h3+ 54 ♔c7 ♕h2+ 55 ♔b7 ♕h5!

An inspired attempt by Movsesian, but it is too late. The position after 55...♕f4 56 b5 g5 57 b6 g4 58 fxg4 ♕xg4 can be found in the endgame tablebases: White wins by the centralizing 59 ♕e5!.

56 ♔c6

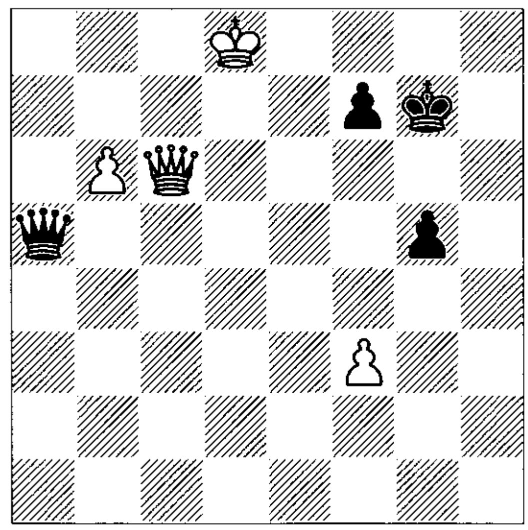
56 ♕xh5? gxh5 is a draw after another set of mutual promotions.

56...♕h3 57 ♔b7 ♕h5 58 ♕c6! ♔g7 59 b5 ♕e5 60 b6 g5

The black pawns are much too slow compared to the white b-pawn.

61 ♔c8 ♕f5+ 62 ♔d8 ♕a5 *(D)*

W



63 ♕d6!

The last accurate move: another powerful centralization that shields White's king from perpetual check.

63...♕a8+ 64 ♔c7 ♕xf3 65 b7 ♕c3+ 66 ♔d7 ♕h3+ 67 ♔d8 ♕h8+ 68 ♔c7 1-0

Only time will tell if the future of chess will develop along the lines I have predicted here. However, one thing is for sure: chess has a glorious past, an exciting present, and a great future! Even after centuries of practice and theorizing, the game is far from exhausted. Ambitious players should learn and cherish the legacy of the game, but in such a way that the great achievements of the past and present giants discussed in this book are used as stepping-stones to an even greater future! Improving your chess starts with internalizing the lessons of the legends of chess history, but only the critical reflection on and creative application of this knowledge expands the boundaries of human excellence in chess.

The past is to be respected and acknowledged, but not to be worshipped. It is our future in which we will find our greatness.
PIERRE TRUDEAU

Index of Games

Numbers refers to pages. When a player's name appears in **bold**, that player had White. Otherwise, the FIRST-NAMED PLAYER had the white pieces.

Index of Openings

Numbers refer to pages. Codes are from the ECO system.

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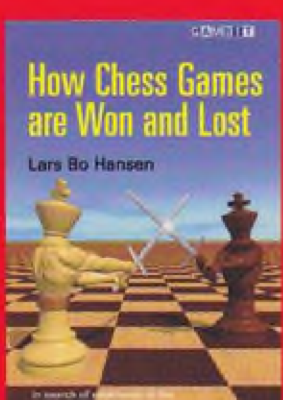
If you want to reach the heights, you should study the entire history of chess. I can't give any clear logical explanation for it, but I think it is absolutely essential to soak up the whole of chess history.
VLADIMIR KRAMNIK

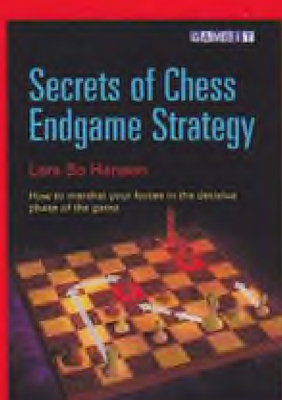
In this book Lars Bo Hansen shows how chess understanding has evolved and explains how and why a study of the great champions of the past and present will significantly improve your chess. Although modern chess is a highly concrete game where calculation is paramount and principles often appear to take a back seat, Hansen argues that the principles have become implicit at top level: "you cannot win games only by following Steinitz's or Nimzowitsch's principles, but you will certainly lose games if you don't know these principles!"

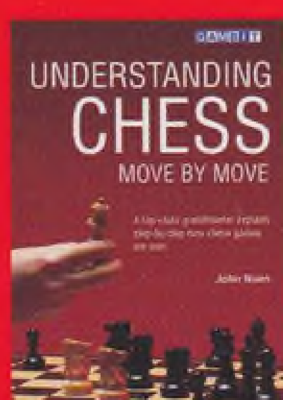
Hansen shows that pattern recognition – one of the most vital aspects of chess mastery – is built up highly effectively by studying historic games, and cites many examples which will immediately form part of your armoury. Building upon the structure of his acclaimed work *How Chess Games are Won and Lost*, Hansen also contends that the transitions opening-to-middlegame and middlegame-to-endgame are best understood by studying the games of the great champions.

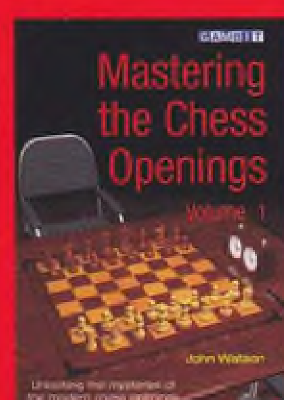
Throughout the book, the emphasis is firmly on improving your chess, and equipping you to develop your chess further by studying on your own. At the same time, you will enjoy a feast of the most instructive chess games of all time – both classical and modern. The final chapter discusses how chess may evolve in the future.

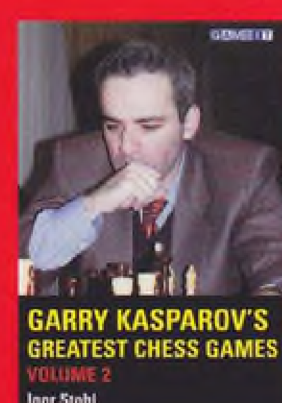
Lars Bo Hansen is a well-known grandmaster from Denmark. He has won the Danish Championship on two occasions, and represented his country in six olympiads, winning a bronze medal for his individual performance in 1990. His many tournament victories include first prize in the strong Copenhagen Open in both 1997 and 2000. Away from the board, he teaches and lectures on business studies, with a particular focus on marketing, organization and strategy. This is his fourth book for Gambit.

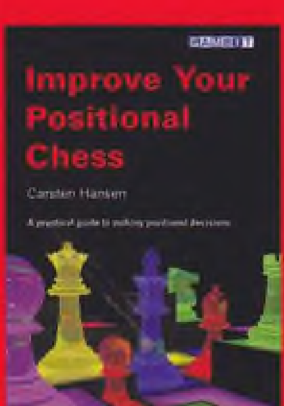


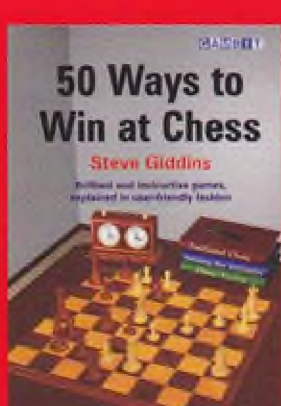


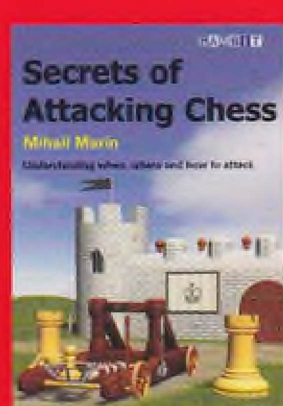












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